



THE INDEPENDENT

ON SATURDAY

Saturday 17 January 1998

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INSIDE
YOUR FIVE
SECTION
PAPER

YOUR MONEY



TIME OFF



EYE



Collect it,
gape at it:
Special art
issue

THE MAGAZINE

The fight for green Britain



United in opposition: Everyone from a mayor to local activists support direct action to stop 113 homes being built on this site next to the East Sussex town of Peacehaven. Pictured left to right are: Roy Goodall, Mayor of Teiscombe; 'Dom' and 'Lizzy', local environmental campaigners; Mark Mansbridge, a community worker; John Livings, chair of Peacehaven Residents' Association; and Alan Byng, deputy mayor of Peacehaven

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DOUBLE TOKENS
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INDEPENDENT AND
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COLLECT

TODAY'S NEWS

Rapist forces legal change

A rapist whose actions led to Government promises to change the law after he humiliated his victims in court was told he would have to serve 21 years in jail for a series of attacks. Milton Brown, 44, caused outrage last year when he forced a widow and a graduate he had attacked at knifepoint to relive their torment in the witness box in intimate detail. Page 3

Pig run ends

The great Malmesbury pig hunt finally ended yesterday when the remaining Ginger Tamworth escapee was captured by police and RSPCA inspectors. Page 17

Head for sums

Schoolchildren under the age of seven or eight should be expected to do most mathematical calculations in their heads, rather than using pencil and paper, according to a report from the Government's Numeracy Task Force, to be published next week. Page 3

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Eco-warriors and roads protesters are joining the fight against housebuilding in the countryside, threatening occupations and tunnels on building sites. Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott's decision not to stop massive housing development in Hertfordshire's green belt has not helped, says Environment Correspondent Nicholas Schoon.

Direct-action protesters say the time has come to shift from trying to stop roads - where they have a propaganda success - to blocking new houses on greenfield sites.

Local residents trying to save the green fields in their back yards show every sign of welcoming them. And more traditional campaigning groups, like Friends of the Earth, have no objections.

Supporters of Earth First! are expected to attend a London conference today of community groups fighting housing plans, organised by FoE and the road protest group Alarm UK. The House Builders Federation is drawing up plans to defend its central London office from an invasion by Swampy-style activists.

The stakes were raised yesterday when John Prescott said he would not stand in the way of plans to build about 10,000 new homes on farmland west of Stevenage. At 800 hectares, it will be one of the biggest single losses of green belt land since the designation was invented 60 years ago to stop cities sprawling into one another.

"It's outrageous," said FoE. The Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) said it had not seen such bad decisions since Nicholas Ridley was a Tory environment secretary in the Eighties.

Mr Prescott, Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions had until today to decide whether to seek to change Hertfordshire County Council's structure plan - the blueprint which includes the green belt development.

Yesterday he told *The Independent* he accepted Hertfordshire's argument that building many of the new homes the county needed in the countryside just west of Stevenage was the best environmental option.

"It just made a lot of sense," he said. People living in the new residential area, the size of a small town, would be able to work and shop in nearby Stevenage and use its public transport infrastructure, thereby minimising pollution.

But, in general, preserving the green belt remained "almost sacrosanct". Next month he will publish a document setting out how the Government would encourage new housing on derelict land within cities and minimise the need to build on greenfield, out-of-town sites. He said he was looking at the case for taxing this kind of development to discourage it.

"The renaissance and attractiveness of cities is absolutely crucial for this government."

Environmentalists still have high hopes for this document. But Tony Burton, housing campaigner with the CPRE, said the Hertfordshire decision "locks us in to continued damage to the countryside".

Greens were just as appalled by Mr Prescott's decision last month to order West Sussex County Council to find room for 12,800 homes. That is one third more than West Sussex argued the county could cope with if it was to avoid overcrowding and environmental degradation.

They are still hoping Mr Prescott will intervene to stop the loss of 480 hectares of green belt land north of Newcastle. Mr Prescott's department has until next Wednesday to intervene in the structure plan process.

Hertfordshire wants to create five times as much new green belt land as the quantity which will be lost, guaranteeing half of the county's remaining countryside protection from urban sprawl.

But environmental groups and local residents say the existing green belt was created to stop Stevenage sprawling into rural areas. If it is scrapped when it comes under pressure for housing, then why should the new green belt be any safer, they say.

Stars back ban, page 3

Britain rattles sabre at Saddam

The Government stepped up its sabre-rattling at Saddam Hussein, ordering the aircraft carrier *Invincible* to the Gulf. But it is unclear whether the US or Britain really have an intention of delivering on their threats. Anthony Bevins and Patrick Cockburn report on the latest standoff between Iraq and the UN Security Council.

The Ministry of Defence said the decision to move the carrier from the Mediterranean followed recent Iraqi attempts to block the work of the UN special commission, sent in to find and destroy weapons of mass destruction.

George Robertson, Secretary of State for Defence, said: "Saddam's continued obstruction of UN inspectors is a matter of serious concern. We remain determined to see that the authority of the UN and the international community is upheld."

A US-led team of arms inspectors left Baghdad yesterday, easing the confrontation with Iraq, which had accused its leader of being a spy. UN officials in Baghdad insisted they had planned to leave anyway and their departure was not the result of Iraqi pressure. Scott Ritter, the inspector accused of espionage, said: "We will be back" as he and 15 other team members left Baghdad for an air base 40 miles away. They were to fly to Bahrain and then to New York.

Iraq had barred the team from carrying out inspections since Monday.

Meanwhile, Richard Butler, the chief of UN inspectors, is to visit Baghdad to demand full access to all sites.

President Clinton is waiting to see the results of Mr Butler's visit. He said he expected solid support in the UN and praised a Security Council statement this week that deplored the blocking of the US-led team.

The UN Security Council ordered the destruction of Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes as a condition for ending the 1991 Gulf War. UN officials report progress in eliminating the nuclear and chemical programmes but suspect Iraq is holding back considerable information on biological weaponry. Iraq says the inspectors are simply being used as an excuse to maintain sanctions against Iraq.

Despite a facade of unity at the Security Council and British backing, the US appears to be making no progress in winning broad support for action to punish Iraq. Three of the five permanent members of the Security Council - Russia, China and France - want sanctions to be eased and Iraq to be given hope of them being lifted.

"Our first priority is to pursue all possible diplomatic avenues to persuade Iraq of the folly of its repeated efforts to thwart UNSCOM, and to secure its full and unreserved compliance with Security Council resolutions," said Mr Robertson. "Saddam's track record clearly demonstrates that he only shows respect for diplomacy when it is backed by military strength and readiness."

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COLUMN ONE

In TV's battle of ideas, the viewer is the loser

There used to be a joke that all Australian soap operas were made in the same building in downtown Sydney so that the three actors who seemed to star in everything from *The Sullivans* to *Country Practice* could run from studio to studio while changing costumes.

It now appears that British television is no better off for ideas than Seventies Australia was for soap stars.

ITV has announced that it is planning a major drama about the lives of ambulance drivers. This, it claims, will be nothing like *Casualty*. Oh no, nothing like it. The BBC's drama is about ambulance drivers and nurses. ITV's drama is just about ambulance drivers. So it is only half like *Casualty*. The bandage-swaddled extras in ITV's show will no doubt just be dropped off at the doors of casualty departments so viewers don't get confused.



Double taker: Helen Baxendale will star in ITV version of *Friends*

This comes hard on the heels of the *Neighbours* at *War/Neighbours* from Hell débacle two weeks ago when both the BBC and ITV "real people" documentary units reached the inevitable point where everybody in the country has been filmed for a fly-on-the-wall documentary.

There is more *déjà vu* programming like this to come because ITV has poached the man who made *Driving School* and *Airport* for the BBC - indeed ITV is planning a programme with the original title of *Airline*. Which, rather like the *Casualty* rip-off, will no doubt stop filming when planes get to airport departure gates so no one can claim it is derivative.

Keeping with the transport theme, there is presumably an ITV documentary planned which will follow people in taxis getting taken to the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool, but will then leave them as they get to the door. If the "real people" documentary trend is not stopped soon then Andy Warhol's "famous for 15 minutes" prediction will prove to have been woefully optimistic: we shall all end up with our own 15-part series.

And when the one British television idea gets a little threadbare at the elbows there is of course other people's ideas to nick: ITV (oh dear, them again) also announced this week its own version of *Friends*, starring Helen Baxendale - who was once in *Cardiac Arrest*, a medical drama that had very few ambulances in it.

This sit-com, *Cold Feet*, will be about six yuppie friends in Manchester. To be fair to ITV this will probably be nothing like *Friends* in so far as *Friends* is funny. An idea which ITV sit-coms never, ever, try to steal.

Even on the cutting edge of television, things are no better. BBC 2 announced this week that they would be investing in more themed nights - one for later this year devoted to the career of Michael Caine, and one in April to mark Spike Milligan's 80th birthday.

This is all very nice for fans of Michael Caine and Spike Milligan, but themed nights have rather overstayed their welcome. When Channel 4 developed them as a wheeze to cover up acres of repeats, you could only admire their *chutzpah*. But now that everyone is at it, it is only a matter of time before we get a night devoted to ambulances driven by Australian actors.

— Paul McCann, Media Correspondent

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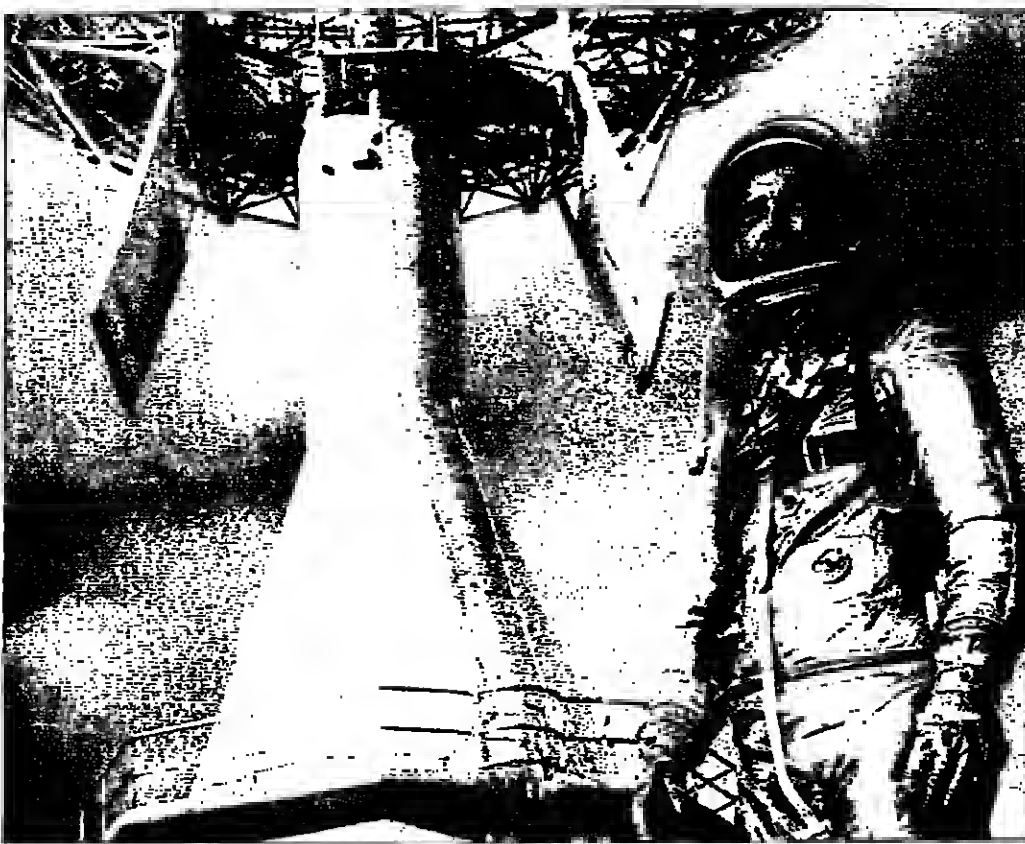
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TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.42	Italy (lira)	2,843
Austria (schillings)	20.21	Japan (yen)	210.83
Belgium (francs)	59.41	Malta (lira)	0.63
Canada (\$)	2.28	Netherlands (guilders)	3.24
Cyprus (pounds)	0.84	Norway (kroner)	11.96
Denmark (kroner)	11.02	Portugal (escudos)	202.69
France (francs)	9.62	Spain (pesetas)	242.39
Germany (marks)	2.88	Sweden (kroner)	12.76
Greece (drachmel)	157.16	Switzerland (francs)	2.35
Hong Kong (\$)	12.23	Turkey (lira)	336,774
Ireland (punts)	1.15	USA (\$)	1.60

Sources: Thomas Cook
Rates for information purposes only

PEOPLE



Pioneer: John Glenn before making his trip into orbit in 1962

Photograph: Reuters

Glenn's second chance to make history in space

If you have the Right Stuff, then it never goes away. That seems to be the opinion of the US space agency NASA about John Glenn, now 76. He was the first American to orbit the Earth - and, if a mission this October (by which time he will be 77) goes smoothly, also the oldest to do so.

It was 36 years ago that Glenn thrilled his country by catching up with the Soviet Union in the space race. Since then he has become a Democratic senator representing Ohio. Yesterday he declared he was ready to go, confessing to "a real sense of déjà vu."

"Needless to say, I'm excited to be back and I'm honoured and I'm privileged," he said. "The important thing is the opportunity that this gives to take us in some new directions in research."

The particular focus of the research will be on ageing, and the effects of space travel on an older body. Glenn exercises daily and lifts weights, but his body has 36 more years of wear and tear than when it last experienced the extreme forces of blast-off on 23 February, 1962. Doctors will study the effect of weightlessness on Glenn's bones and immune system, and his ability to bounce back afterwards.

Nasa approved Glenn's appointment to become

a payload specialist on the Shuttle *Discovery* for a flight tentatively set for October. "I see this as another adventure into the unknown," Glenn said.

Since he flew into the unknown for the first time, Nasa also has 36 more years of space expertise, but that doesn't translate into a hazard-free mission. One space expert said: "Probably there's as much risk today flying the Shuttle as there was then because (in 1962) Glenn had an escape rocket that there isn't on the orbiter. And I wouldn't want to go through the training he would have to go through."

Even so, Glenn lobbied Nasa extensively to get it to consider using him for geriatric research, helping to connect the space agency's researchers with scientists eager for the information that tests in weightlessness might provide about human ageing.

The tests are "scientific research on the process of getting older, which we're all concerned about," said John Logsdon, of George Washington University.

"What is happening is they've decided to make Glenn the subject of those experiments, not making up the experiment so he can fly," he said. "I think that's an important distinction."

— Charles Arthur, Science Editor

Evans pulls plug on old rival Jono Coleman

The award-winning Virgin Radio presenter Jonathan Coleman has been sacked by his former rival and new boss, Chris Evans, while he is on holiday.

The announcement of Coleman's departure was made while he was in his native Australia with his mother, Sylvia, who is ill. But his Russ'n'Jono show partner, Russell Williams, is staying on at the station, in which Evans bought a controlling interest, for £85m, last year. "The show had run its course and Jonathan is moving on," a Virgin spokesman said. "All good things must come to an end and we wish Jono every success in the future."

When Russ'n'Jono were Evans's main breakfast rivals during his spell at Radio 1, Coleman missed no opportunity to take the rise out of him. He taunted Evans with their Sony Award for best breakfast show - a missed



Jono Coleman: Never passed up a chance to needle Evans

prize that angered Evans so much that he refused to accept his Broadcaster of the Year award at the same ceremony. When Evans walked out of Radio 1 because it would not give him Fridays off to prepare his Channel 4 show, Coleman pointed to his own five-

days-a-week presenter's job at Channel 5, and said Evans was a lightweight.

Losing their Virgin Radio breakfast slot to Evans in October was a blow for Russ'n'Jono. There were rumours they had been sacked - until Coleman went to a football match with the Virgin proprietor, Richard Branson, and their new drivetime show was announced a week later. Coleman was last on air five weeks ago, before his annual Australian break. Bosses made the decision to let him go two days ago, and told his agent yesterday. Williams, who used to have his own solo show, will now follow Evans at 10am each day, and rising star Robin Banks will do the 4-7pm drivetime show. The spokesman said: "Russ has always been a music presenter, whereas Jono was more of a personality."

Seagal sues Saudi prince over £30m film deal

Action hero Steven Seagal has decided law suits speak louder than fists and is suing a Saudi prince he says reneged on a film deal.

Seagal is suing Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al Saud, half brother to King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, for more than \$25m (£15m) after the prince pulled out of financing the film *Men of Honour*.

The movie star says Prince Abdullah is a man of no honour after failing to go through with a 1992 verbal agreement, confirmed in writing, to finance the film for £30m in return for world-wide distribution rights.

Seagal, 47, star of films such as *Under Siege*, *Out for Justice* and *Under Siege 2: Dark Territory*, is suing for breach of contract, intentional misrepresentation and negligent misrepresentation.

Men of Honour was to star martial arts expert Seagal who says he made expensive preparations for filming, believing he had secured funding from the prince.

According to the suit filed at the Los Angeles Superior Court, the prince stumped up \$1.65m but failed to follow up with the rest. The actor says he has no idea why the prince did not go through with

the deal. As a result, Seagal says his company Seagal/Nasso Productions Incorporated has lost a substantial sum of money.

Seagal's lawyer, Scott Lord, said: "With \$30m all from one source, Steven went ahead with preparations to make the film. The prince forwarded \$1.65m for expenses and then pulled the plug."

Prince Abdullah was served with a writ in New York in November, which Seagal's lawyers say he has ignored. They have asked the prince's lawyers to explain his actions to the Los Angeles court.

— Rosa Prince

UPDATE

PUBLIC FINANCE

Cost of Mandelson's Disney trip

The cost to the taxpayer of Peter Mandelson's four-day visit to the United States earlier this month, during which he visited Disney World, was £3,450, he revealed last night in a series of written Commons replies to John Redwood, shadow Trade and Industry Secretary, and Francis Maude, shadow spokesman on Culture, Media and Sport.

The Minister without Portfolio, said: "Walt Disney are world leaders in entertainment." He had visited Disney World to learn at first hand from their wide experience, lessons that could be applied to the Millennium Dome project. "I had extensive discussions on technical matters, managing the flow of visitors, service facilities, and other aspects of this highly successful public attraction."

Asked by Mr Redwood how much it would have cost to go to the Paris Disney World, Mr Mandelson said he had particularly wanted to visit the Educational Prototype Community of Tomorrow Centre, in Miami, and he had also been able "to fit in a short programme in Washington", arranged by the embassy, following a private overnight stay on arrival. "A direct cost comparison is not therefore relevant in this case," he said.

— Anthony Bevins, Political Editor

EDUCATION

Unit to cut red tape in schools

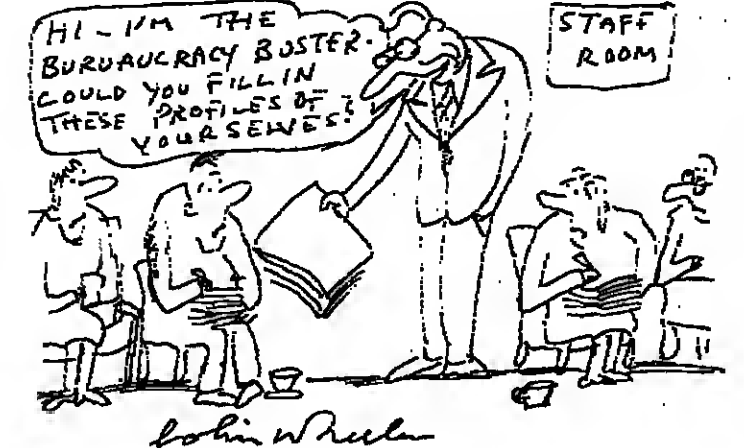
A bureaucracy-busting unit will be set up as part of Government plans to cut red tape in schools.

A report drawn up by a working group established last May recommends that the Government should consult fewer schools about policy, set up pilots to show how teachers can streamline administration, review demands on teachers and simplify the bidding process for funds.

Inspectors are to be urged to concentrate on standards, not on whether schools have written policies for everything and the Government will try to cut down the requirements for assessing and recording pupils' work.

Teachers' leaders welcomed the report with reservations. Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said: "The Government has at least five new initiatives lined up. There is no evidence that it has considered whether there is time for them in the school day."

— Judith Judd, Education Editor



FISHERIES

Net gain for dolphin population

The Government yesterday acted to help save dwindling dolphin populations by announcing changes to licences for tuna drift net fishing.

Elliot Morley, the fisheries minister, said the move would affect the seas south-west of Britain.

He said: "This is the first step towards ending the unacceptable toll of dolphins in drift nets."

"The UK is pressing for the agreement of other EU member states to take similar immediate action as well as to agree to a phase-out."

The licence will apply to all UK vessels over 10 metres and will prevent additional vessels joining the fleet pending EU agreement to a phase-out.

Mr Morley said that from 1 February, the only UK vessels eligible to fish for tuna using drift nets, for which a separate non-transferable licence will be required, will be those which did so in either 1996 or 1997.

"This will limit participation to a maximum of 10 vessels, and some of these have been approved for a decommissioning grant which they can take up by the end of February."

COMPUTERS

Gearing up for millennium bomb

Four full-time officials are working on the Department of Trade and Industry's initiative to help UK businesses tackle the millennium computer time-bomb. Cheryl Gillan, the Tory frontbench spokeswoman, was told last night.

Mrs Gillan complained that with less than 500 working days left before the millennium, the Government had wasted precious time by abandoning its own Taskforce 2000, replacing it with Action 2000, which had yet to take any action.

Barbara Roche, the junior trade minister who has been given lead responsibility for the issue, told Mrs Gillan in a written Commons reply that a package of support for small- and medium-sized businesses would be announced this month as part of a Millennium Bug Campaign. Action 2000 has an annual budget of £1m, but Mrs Gillan was told by the Ministry of Defence that its current estimate of the cost of tackling the problem was a tentative £200m.

— Anthony Bevins, Political Editor

HEALTH

Scots cut heart-attack deaths

Scotland is set to achieve its target 40-per-cent reduction in heart disease deaths set under the 1992 Health of the Nation strategy two years ahead of the original deadline of 2000.

Scotland's Chief Medical Officer, Sir David Carter, said the Government would now look at increasing the target from the year 2000 because of the good progress being made.

"We are well on course," he said. "It is reassuring that we're moving in the right direction but we want to see much more movement. We have almost hit the target, so we will want to have a new target."

However, the reduction still leaves Scotland topping the table in the number of premature deaths from heart disease in people under the age of 65.

Sir David added "It is going to remain a priority of the Government, as Scotland has a terrible record in coronary heart disease."

— Jeremy Laurance, Health Editor

BBC World/BBC News 24

An article in yesterday's *Independent* suggested that the BBC cut jobs from its global news channel BBC World to subsidise the cost of BBC News 24. In fact, the funding for the two channels is entirely separate: the former is funded by advertising revenue while BBC News 24 is licence fee funded. No senior World editors are being made redundant.



مكتبة الامم المتحدة

3/LEADING STORIES

THE INDEPENDENT
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Sorry, kids: in the calculator age, sums still matter

Proposals to raise standards in maths with a new emphasis on mental arithmetic and more, better whole-class teaching, will be proposed by the Government's Numeracy Task Force next week. But the report is not a blueprint for a return to traditional teaching methods, says Judith Judd, Education Editor.

British children are lagging behind their counterparts elsewhere because schools' expectations of them are too low, the report says. Children should be expected to do most mathematical calculations in their heads, rather than using pencil and paper, until they are seven or eight.

The task force, led by Professor David Reynolds of Newcastle University, will give a strong endorsement to methods being trialled by the National Numeracy Project, in which 10 minutes are spent at the beginning of each maths lesson on mental calculation. David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education, commissioned the inquiry to help fulfil his promise that 75 per cent of 11-year-olds will be at the expected level in maths by the year 2002. The present figure is 62 per cent.

Last year England came tenth out of 17, far behind countries in the Pacific Rim and Eastern Europe, in an international survey of the mathematical performance of nine-year-olds. Countries such as the United States, Canada and Ireland, which were level with or below England six years previously, have pulled ahead.

The task force report draws on the experience of Hungary and Switzerland as well as several projects in Britain, especially the National Numeracy Project.

British teachers spend less time teaching the whole class than those in most other countries. The figure is between 25 and 30 per cent compared with between 70 and 80 per cent in some Pacific Rim countries.

The report urges more whole-class teaching, though it does not specify how much.

Like the Literacy Task Force, whose report was published last year, the maths group want to see a dramatic change in the

educational culture in Britain and an end to the assumption that there will always be a sizeable minority of children who cannot make the grade.

Professor Reynolds and his team do not advocate a return to the teaching methods of the fifties, when children sat in desks in rows and the teacher taught the whole class all the time. Nor do they propose the compulsory chanting of times tables.

Instead, they argue that teachers should use a mixture of methods. Though there should be more whole-class teaching in which children take an active part, pupils should also work in groups and on their own. Practical and investigative maths in which they find out things for themselves should continue alongside a renewed emphasis on mental calculation. Multiplication tables should be taught but in many different ways including the use of games and computers.

The quality of teaching, they say, is just as important as the method and teachers should be given more training. Where schools are getting good results, they should not be required to change.

Ministers have said they expect all primary schools to have a "numeracy hour" every day in the same way as the prescribed literacy hour. However, the report suggests that schools should spend between 45 minutes and an hour each day on numeracy. Experience of teachers involved in the National Numeracy Project suggests that an hour may be too long.

Parents should play a key role in raising standards, the report suggests. Materials should be available for them to help their children with maths even before they start school and help should be offered to parents who feel their own maths is so bad that they cannot help their children.

There should be a national year of reading, perhaps to coincide with International Maths Year in the year 2000. It would involve parents and the rest of the community in the same way as the National Year of Reading which is due to start this September. On the place of calculators in primary schools, on which the team were asked to advise, the report is silent. Some members are thought to be angry the Government decided to ban calculators in primary schools last year before their report was complete.



Calculating look: Children should initially do most sums in their heads, the report says. Photograph: Philip Meech

IN MONDAY'S
INDEPENDENT



Is Elisabeth Murdoch as scary as her dad?

MEDIA+

Deborah Ross interviews Julie Burchill

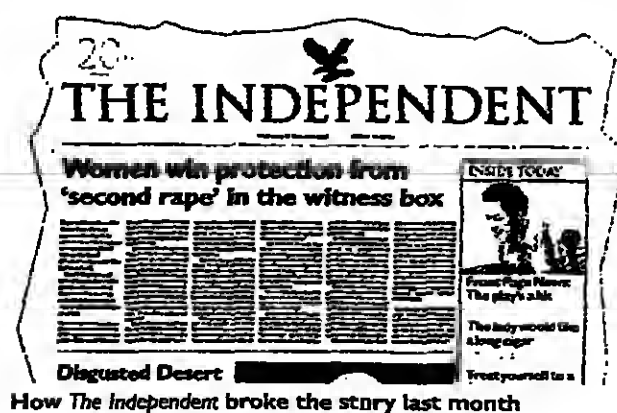
FEATURES

Do our genes determine us? The experts slug it out

SCIENCE

Twenty-one years for rapist who humiliated victims in court

A rapist, whose actions led to Government promises to change the law after he humiliated his victims in court, was told he would have to serve a total of 21 years in jail for a series of vicious attacks. Steve Boggan and Melvyn Howe report.



How The Independent broke the story last month

Milton Brown caused public outrage last year when he made two sex-attack victims re-live their ordeals in the witness box - apparently for nothing more than his own pleasure.

The legal system gave him the right to conduct his own defence and, despite obvious anxiety, the trial judge was powerless in the face of a man who took his rights and abused them as much as his victims.

He could not be named at the time to avoid prejudicing a second case, involving the repeated savage beating of a girlfriend, Susan McDonald, 29, whom he imprisoned for five days without medical help with a festering stab wound and multiple breaks and fractures.

But yesterday, Judge Leo Charles QC, sitting at Knightsbridge Crown Court, west London, sentenced the former mechanic to five years in prison for the attacks on Miss Mc-

Donald, who suffered multiple broken ribs, a broken arm and injuries all over her body after being hit by Brown, 44, with bottles, a pool cue and wood encrusted with nails.

That was added on to the 16 years he was already facing for two other sex attacks in 1996. Only at the end of yesterday's proceedings could it be revealed that he also has a total of 58 convictions for violence, dishonesty and sexual offences, including child molestation.

As Brown screamed and yelled that he had been convicted by a "kangaroo court", and while the jury sat shaking their heads, having found him guilty of the attack on Miss McDonald only by majority verdict, the judge went on: "The public is in need of protection from you because you showed just how dangerous you are and just how

much very serious harm you cause to other people when you are at large." Brown's spree of violence began early in 1996 when he befriended a 38-year-old mother of three who had just arrived in London. She met Brown and accepted his offer of accommodation, which turned into a 15-hour rape ordeal.

After beginning a relationship with Miss McDonald in May 1996, he became obsessive and began accusing her of seeing other men. He beat her over and over again and locked her in his flat in Camberwell, south east London, taking her out in a wig and dark glasses only to hobble to a soup kitchen.

During one of these visits, she escaped when he was distracted by a 31-year-old graduate, who was drunk, having been celebrating an exam success. While Miss McDonald

limped away, the graduate was sexually assaulted at knifepoint.

During last year's trial, he spent days cross examining the women. The rape victim had to give evidence in the witness box.

After the trial, the judge was discharged following a violent exchange between Brown and the judge, Timothy Pontius.

"Do I have to put up with this?" one of the women asked the judge. "I have never been so humiliated in my life."

After jailing Brown for 16 years, Judge Pontius said it was "highly regrettable" that the law allowed a defendant "to question his victims in needlessly extended and agonising detail for the obvious purpose of intimidation and humiliation".

Tony Blair and Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, have said they want to end an offenders' right to commit "second rape" in court. And last month, Lord Irvine of Lairg, the Lord Chancellor, told *The Independent* that judges would be given more powers to intervene in cross-examinations, conducting it themselves in cases where alleged rapists appeared to be humiliating their victims.

The Home Office said yesterday that proposed changes could be put forward as soon as the spring. It is understood the main obstacle will be in complying with the European Convention on Human Rights, which gives defendants the right to represent themselves.

Sports stars back ban on sale of school fields

Senior British sports figures yesterday welcomed the Government's pledge to stop state schools and local authorities selling off playing fields.

As three government departments announced co-ordinated statutory measures to halt further sales, Tessa Sanderson, Olympic javelin thrower, and Roger Utley, England's rugby union manager, spoke of the urgent need for more facilities

if Britain hopes to breed the next generation of sports stars. Regulations to be tabled to the School Standards and Framework Bill, which is currently before Parliament, will mean state schools will need the permission of the education secretary before selling any more land. At the same time, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Department of

Culture, Media and Sport intend to tighten planning controls. A new adjudication process will rule on local authority sales which are opposed by the English Sports Council.

The Government has also sent a clear message to LEAs "discouraging" them from selling any more before the proposed legislation became law. The legislation currently before Parliament affects schools in

England but it is likely that yesterday's move would be extended across the country.

Over the past two decades school playing fields have been sold off at an alarming rate as local authorities tried to raise money from surplus assets. More than 5,000 have gone to private developers since 1981, and thousands more are under threat.

— Clare Garner

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Dublin renews calls for Bloody Sunday investigation

The Irish government has stepped up its pressure for an independent public investigation of Bloody Sunday in advance of next week's anticipated Commons statement on the issue by Tony Blair. David McKitterick and Alan Murdoch assess its chances.

The Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, is understood to have underlined to the Prime Minister in a telephone conversation his view that nothing less than an independent public inquiry would be acceptable to Dublin. Fourteen civilians were killed in the incident in Londonderry in 1972.

The Irish authorities are determined any new investigation should be fully independent and headed by a figure of prestige acceptable to all sides. Mr Ahern made clear again his view that an apology would not suffice.

On Wednesday Mr Blair is due to answer a parliamentary question from Norman Godman, chairman of the Labour party's back-bench committee on Northern Ireland, who yesterday travelled to Londonderry to view the scene of the killings. He said he believed Tony Blair and the Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, were sympathetic to calls for a fresh inquiry. The 26th anniversary of the deaths falls on 30 January. A campaign to have the incident reopened has gained momentum in recent years, winning the support of Dublin and other important elements. The past year in particular has seen the emergence

of new evidence shedding fresh light on the incident.

Dublin has compiled its own report, said to provide detailed analysis of the latest evidence and to draw "very strong conclusions".

While the Government has come under pressure to act, it represents a political and legal minefield for the authorities.

Almost any move, whether in the form of a new inquiry or an official apology, raises the question of possible prosecution of the paratroopers who fired the shots or, conceivably, their superior officers.

It is presumed the authorities would wish at all costs to avoid charges and trials.

There is no clear optimism in Irish government circles that the inquiry will be conceded, given Ministry of Defence reservations about the damage that might result for the Army's reputation and the civil service if a cover-up were exposed.

Campaigner Tony Doherty, whose father Paddy was among those killed, said: "It appears from all accounts that the British Cabinet may be at odds with itself as to how it may proceed. There are clearly different forces at work. Some of the members of the Cabinet may well agree with demands to establish a new inquiry but there are forces such as the Ministry of Defence, who would be against it."

Yesterday seven IRA prisoners were transferred from Britain to the Irish Republic. They included five men who six months ago were jailed for 35 years for planning to blow up British power-stations in 1996, and members of the "Balcombe Street gang", who were responsible for 16 killings in England in the 1970s.



Apple avalanche: Householder Tim Reeve (right) and his family escaped injury yesterday when a lorry overturned outside their home in Aspall Green, near Debenham, Suffolk, spilling a ton of fruit into the property. Photographs: Anglia Press Agency

Vicar jailed for attacking wife

A Church of England vicar accused of trying to kill his wife in an apparently motiveless hammer attack was yesterday jailed for five years.

The Rev Michael Golightly, 54, of Durham City, was acquitted of attempted murder by a jury at Newcastle Crown Court but convicted of causing grievous bodily harm with intent.

The court was told that Enid Golightly, 55, almost died after being struck a single blow with a 1½lb hammer while she was asleep in bed. The blow was of such force that fragments of bone were pushed 30mm into her brain. Golightly denied responsibility and his counsel claimed an undetected intruder could have launched the attack.

Essex wild-cat alert

An expert in trapping dangerous animals yesterday raised the possibility that a wild cat is roaming Essex woodlands.

Sightings of a creature in Brentwood could be the sign of a wild puma, according to big-cats expert Quentin Rose. Essex police called him in to carry out an investigation of Vicarage Woods after people reported sightings of what appeared to be a lioness. After a search of the woods yesterday, Mr Rose concluded there was no evidence of a big cat at that location, but conceded that there was evidence to suggest there could be wild cats in the area.

Happy landing

Two Britons whose aircraft was forced down by a jet fighter after straying into Russian military airspace were last night preparing to fly home.

Russian authorities earlier said Cliff Davidson and Mark Graham Jeffreys would not be charged for encroaching on the Kaliningrad enclave, home of Russia's Baltic fleet. The Russians sent a fighter to bring the plane down after it was blown off-course by winds while flying over the Baltic en route to London. Kaliningrad is cut off from the rest of Russia and bordered by Lithuania and Poland.

Meningitis jab plan

All first year students due to study in Southampton will be immunised against meningitis after three freshers died from the disease there last year.

The programme of mass immunisation against group C meningitis has been recommended by Dr Mike Barker, the city's consultant in communicable diseases.

He believes the jabs are necessary "as a local response to a locally identified health need".

Gays protest after sex video convictions

Gay activists yesterday protested at the prosecution of seven gay men who were filmed in a private video having consensual sex. Michael Streeter, Legal Affairs Correspondent, reports on a case which has outraged many in the homosexual community.

The case of the so-called Bolton Seven, who were convicted last Monday, at the town's crown court of various sexual offences, is rapidly becoming a cause célèbre among gays. At least one of those convicted, 55-year-old Terry Connell, has been warned by the judge that he faces imprisonment. Janet Cragg, a lawyer representing six of the defendants, said their prosecution, which is

thought to have cost around £300,000, was a "complete waste of public money".

Peter Tatchell, of the gay pressure group Outrage, said the seven were in effect being "martyred". He added: "It is not in the public interest or in the interests of justice that these men have been prosecuted let alone that some of them may be sent to prison."

The case began after a former lodger of one of the seven sent police a video of the men involved in various sexual acts, including buggery and oral sex. A police raid on the home of one of the men in the town later found another video.

Although some of the men, who all come from the area, admitted buggery, four of them denied gross indecency. Under the Sexual Offences Act 1967, in which homosexual acts between two consenting adults were legalised, such sex is only le-

gal if no more than two men are present.

Although three of the defendants were also convicted of sex with someone under age - one of them was 17 at the time - activists are concerned that such prosecutions are an attack on consensual gay sex. The men claimed the videos were simply for their personal use and that everyone had taken part with consent.

The Crown Prosecution Service yesterday defended its decision to bring the case, saying it had considered both the facts and the "public interest" in bringing the action very carefully.

It is understood that when the matter was first raised with the CPS there were suggestions that some of the men - whose age ranged from 17 to 55 - had been paid to take part, and that drugs had been used. There was no evidence of this raised at the trial.

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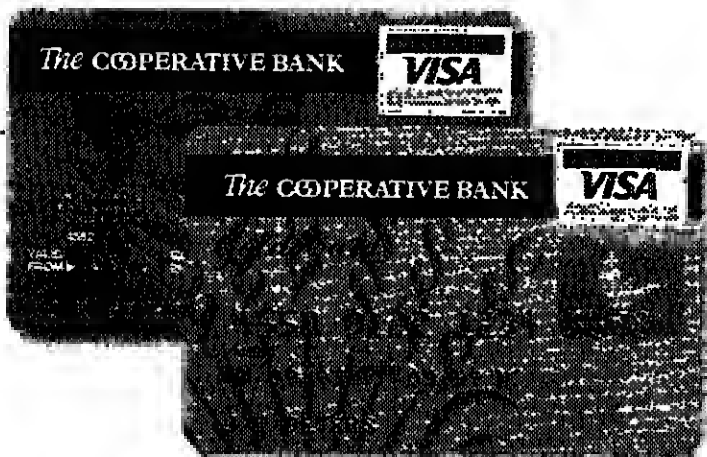
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Amnesty International: working worldwide for the release of prisoners of conscience, fair trials for political prisoners and an end to torture, extra-judicial executions, "disappearances" and the death penalty.

No words — there are no words — to express what this Algerian woman is feeling. In this conflict children are killed in front of parents, people are blowtorched and howl like bagpipes, ordinary folk are caught in horror beyond imagining. You can do something to stop these things, but knowing yourself as you do, are you more likely just to turn the page? Even if there were words, what words could touch you?

On 27th August this year, a group of armed men entered Rais, the village of the woman in the picture, and killed about three hundred people. They spared neither women nor children. The victims died in ways too hideous to describe.

But were we to catalogue each brutal detail, it would still be beyond our power to convey the horror of what was done. Words can't say it and photographs, however gruesome, don't show it.

When words lose power.

It is a filthy conflict in Algeria. Both Government forces and armed groups have committed atrocities.

The Government uses the gangs' atrocities to justify its massive repression of human rights, the armed groups use the repression to justify their atrocities.

The woman from Rais got caught in the middle.

We don't know precisely what loss she suffered, whether she saw her family murdered, her baby dashed to its death, her small daughter disembowelled, her mother's head rolling in the dust.

All these things have happened, if not to this woman, to others just as uninvolved, helpless and anguished. The words on the picture come from the opening paragraph of Amnesty International's latest report on Algeria. We have become used to seeing words like these in our newspapers.

Shocking headlines no longer touch us. We're not moved, we resent being manipulated. Experience says that you'll read this page, turn over and forget it, because this is how you, like the rest of us, have learned to cope with clamouring ads. **Listen to what the children said.**

Two children, sisters of 11 and 13, spoke about the night their parents were killed.

"We woke up at the noise, some armed men were hitting father with a shotgun. They pushed father into the kitchen and the others took mum out into the courtyard and tied her hands. They cut her throat. The other men called from inside the house and the one who slaughtered mum shouted: 'Wait I'm finishing'. We pulled mum into the house and closed her eyes and covered her with a blanket, and also covered father; he had also had his throat cut. We cried and screamed."

Reader, wake up. This isn't a game of words. It isn't some clever advertising agency trying to score a 'creative' coup. It's a plea, a big desperate one, for your help.

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We need you. Even as you are reading this, people are being murdered, tortured, being made to "disappear", thrown in jail without trial.

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Is it right to murder, torture, or imprison people for their religion, the colour of their skin or beliefs?

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Amnesty International was founded on the idea that ordinary people can make a difference in the world, can help to stop murder, torture and other abuse of human rights. Since our foundation in 1961, we have proved over and over and over that we can help.

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The 'Chabaneau', a blowtorch, is routinely used by the Algerian security forces to make suspects 'sing'.

Main picture: Distraught survivor of a massacre carried out at Sidi Rais village by an armed group.

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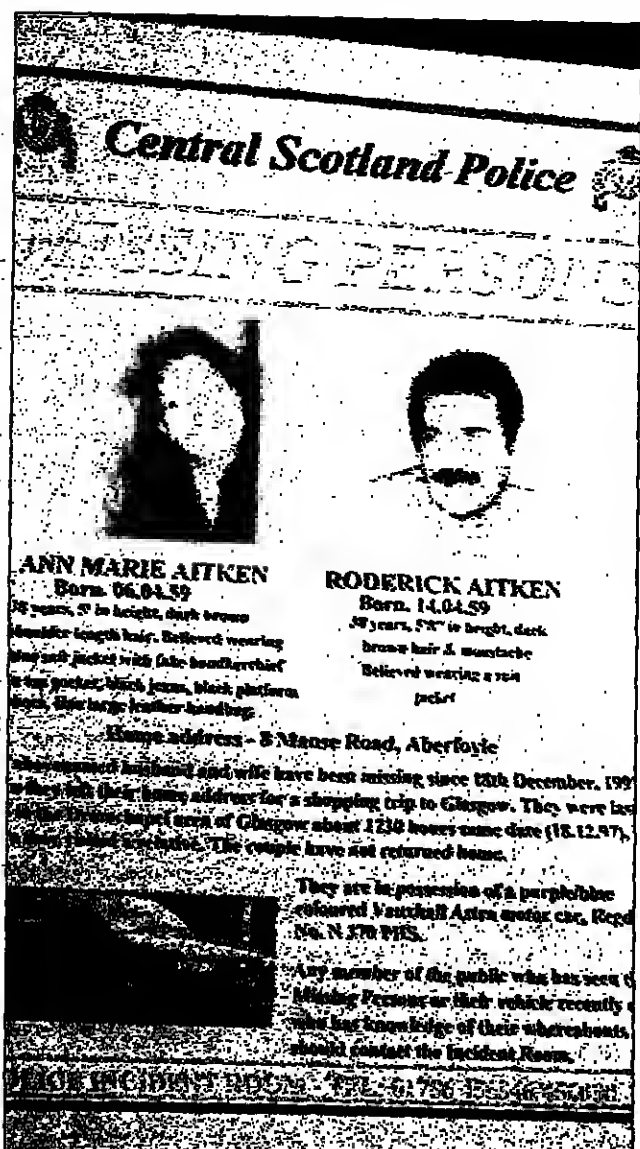
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Mystery of couple who never came back from shopping



The village of Aberfoyle (right), where Roddy and Ann Marie Aitken lived when their disappearance before Christmas prompted a big police search (left). Their daughter, also named Ann Marie (below), does not hold out much hope that her parents are still alive.
Photographs: Tom Pilston

Helicopters, frogmen and dozens of police officers are involved in a massive hunt for a couple who disappeared 30 days ago while out shopping.

Jason Bennetto, Crime Correspondent, went to Scotland to try to unravel the mystery.

Roddy and Ann Marie Aitken seemed to have a lot to live for. Christmas was coming and they were about to spend two weeks with their 13-year-old son, Roddy, in Cyprus catching some winter sun.

They were, says their other child, Ann Marie who turned 20 this week, loving parents who thought the world of their family. On 18 December they drove the 25 miles from their home in the tiny town of Aberfoyle, in central Scotland, to a Glasgow suburb to deliver Christmas cards to Roddy senior's parents, Jessie and Archie.

Shortly afterwards they spoke to their daughter and a friend on their mobile phone to say they would be returning in an hour or so. Ann Marie recalled: "They said they were still doing some shopping and wouldn't be back for a while. We didn't talk long - mobiles are so expensive. I got worried the next day but I didn't want to telephone anyone in case they just turned up. I kept thinking they would be back to-

morrow. I thought they must come home for Christmas Day. My wee brother went to his friends for Christmas. I sat here with my boyfriend and waited for the phone to ring." She waited until Boxing Day - eight days after the disappearance - before her grandparents persuaded her to get the police involved. Speaking at the family home, where she is staying with her brother, she added: "I don't think they will be coming home now, it's been a month without a trace - it's just too long."

For the past fortnight a huge search op-



eration has been taking place among forest-covered peaks and along miles of twisting road amid some of Scotland's most stunning countryside. Interpol and police forces throughout Britain have also been alerted.

But so far no bodies have been found, no burnt-out wreckage discovered, no tell-tale skid marks or car roof staring up from the bottom of a loch.

The Cyprus holiday, which had been paid for with £1,000 cash and was their first foreign trip in six years, remains unused, and the couple's bank accounts are untouched.

Rumours of underworld connections and contract killings have surfaced but detectives believe they are fantasy.

The police are baffled. Surely the bodies would have been found by now if it was an accident, and why would they run away at Christmas? Was this a murder or missing-persons inquiry? Were they looking for one or two people? Nothing makes sense.

As part of the detective work the hunt for the two 38-year-olds shifted yesterday to London, where the family lived before moving to Aberfoyle seven years ago. The six-year stint down south in Fulham and later Sutton, in Surrey, where Roddy worked as a roofer, was the only time the family ventured out of Scotland.

Brought up amid the violent, sprawling Glasgow council estates of Drumchapel in

the north-west of the city, Roddy and Ann Marie started dating at school, were married at 18 and parents a year later.

As a child Roddy was taken to the Trossachs, a wild, beautiful land of steep-sided glens, snowy peaks and dark lochs, about 35 miles north of the Glasgow estates. When a chance came to swap their London council flat for one in safe and unciting Aberfoyle, Perthshire, he grasped it.

But the Glaswegians did not fit into the small, close community. For one thing the parents did not work, relying mainly on benefits, and a disability allowance from a car accident in which Roddy injured his leg. Then there was the drinking. Roddy was barred from several pubs in the town after a number of alcohol-fuelled fights and arguments.

Neighbours said that they were "friendly enough", "no trouble really", "kept

themselves to themselves", while one commented: "They were still quite new - seven years is a short time in Aberfoyle". They did most of their socialising in their old Glasgow haunts. On several occasions Roddy drove home along the back roads after having one too many.

In the past fortnight hundreds of miles of forest tracks have been meticulously searched by the police in case their blue Vauxhall Astra slipped over the edge on that December night.

So far the only clues are a 7pm sighting of them at an Asda store just outside Glasgow shortly after the visit to Roddy's parents, and the calls to a friend and to their daughter.

Shortly after the police went public a tabloid newspaper claimed the disappearance was linked to underworld connections. Police investigations have shown this is al-

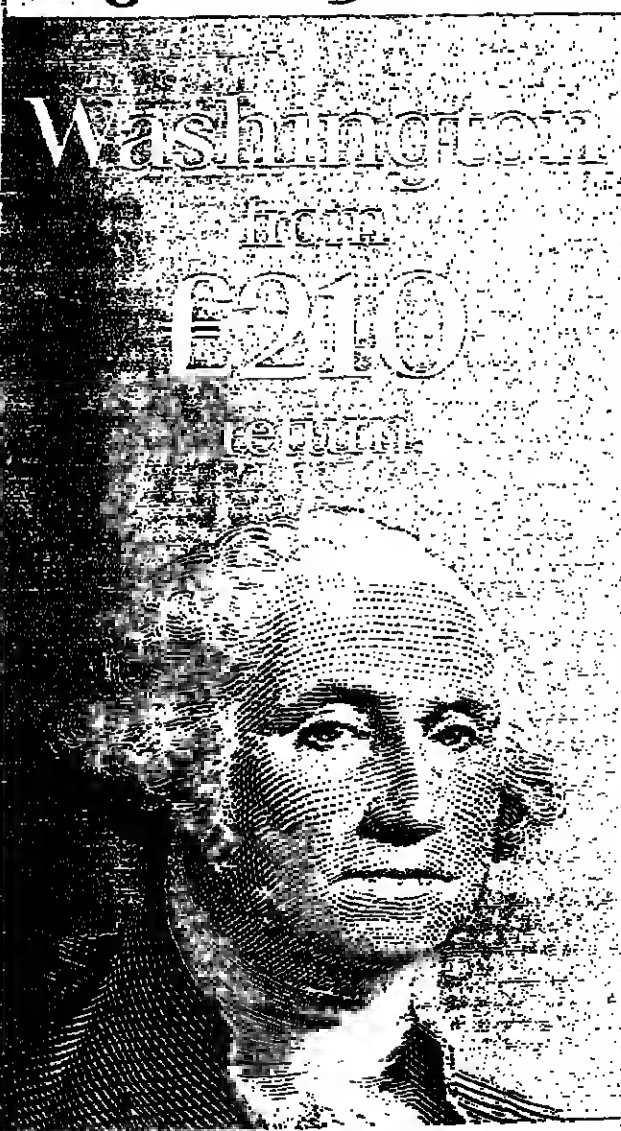
most certainly nonsense. Roddy was apparently considered a "Ned" - a ducker and diver. But he was not known by Glasgow's criminal community and with a handful of convictions for minor drink-related offences it was hardly the stuff of *The Godfather*.

The officer in charge of case, Detective Chief Superintendent, John Ogg, said: "There are no indications whatsoever that there are drug harons or underworld enforcers involved."

He added: "There seems to be a piece of the jigsaw missing. We feel there is someone, or some people with vital information they are withholding."

So are the police looking for a killer or runaways or both? As one officer indicated, we may never know: "This area is very hostile for anyone looking for a body, especially if hidden. You could search for years and find nothing."

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Spencer rebuffed over privacy law

The European Commission of Human Rights yesterday barred Earl Spencer from pursuing a privacy case involving his former wife. Lord Spencer had claimed UK law does not protect him from press intrusion. Michael Sreeter, Legal Affairs Correspondent, considers the implications.

The decision by Lord Spencer to go to the Human Rights Commission in Strasbourg was taken two years ago but yesterday's hearing seemed to come with impeccable timing.

It followed a move by the Government to incorporate the Convention on Human Rights into UK law, the death of Lord Spencer's sister Diana, Princess of Wales, and the recent lurid coverage of the Earl's divorce case. His case was that despite a Press Complaints Commission condemnation of intrusive reporting three years ago of him and his then wife, Victoria Lockwood, British law gives him no effective remedy against the offending newspaper.

Although the PCC can, and did, condemn a newspaper for intrusion - in this case the *News of the World* - it cannot force compensation, nor can it prevent publication of an offending article.

But yesterday's quick rejection by the European Com-

mission of the Earl and Ms Lockwood's application - which came as a surprise to some lawyers - means that any emerging law of privacy Britain will depend on domestic judges. After a few hours' deliberation, the commission ruled that the case should not go before the European Court of Human Rights.

In theory, had the case gone to the European Court, a judgment against the Government would have forced ministers to bring in a statutory law of privacy giving victims the right to damages and in some circumstances the right to stop damaging stories from being published. Ministers, however, who said they were "satisfied" with yesterday's decision, have said they have no such plans.

The future of a privacy law now hangs on the decision of the Government to incorporate the human rights convention into British law.

The Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine of Lairg, has accepted that this is likely to lead to a judge-made law of privacy though both media and lawyers alike are concerned that this could lead to a haphazard development of the law.

Dan Tench, a media lawyer for the London firm Lovell White Durrant, said the ruling did not mean there would be no judge-made privacy law, simply that it would not come from Strasbourg. "It seems the view of the commission is that it is for individual nations to balance the competing interests of freedom of the press and privacy."

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Blair snubs Brown over chairing welfare committee

— Anthony Begins



Within the principles set out in that paper – and subject to further public consultation – detailed proposals would then begin to emerge over the coming year on the various specific issues, like pensions and family benefits.

"We are keen to meet them and feel they are pushing at an open door, because the department feels it is doing as much as it can. It's a shame."

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Grants freeze pushes arts companies to the edge

Arts companies were yesterday said to be "on the edge of survival" as the Arts Council announced its grants for the coming year. David Lister, Arts News Editor, examines the figures and finds that they are not quite as bad as had been feared.

The outgoing Arts Council chairman, Lord Gowrie, yesterday condemned "the worst revenue crisis of my adult lifetime."

However, despite the dramatic words, the vast majority of arts companies received standstill grants rather than the big cuts that had been feared. And changes to National Lottery regulations mean that lottery money will shortly be able to be used for annual revenue funding in the arts.

The latest round of standstill grants are the culmination of five years without an increase in funds from the Government to the Arts Council, meaning it has lost £34m in real terms.

In one interesting aside, Lord Gowrie accused the Treasury of still "taking revenge on David Mellor" referring to the time when Mr Mellor was a Treasury minister and, according to Lord Gowrie, actually persuaded an arts minister to ask for more money.

Lord Gowrie said: "The vengeance is almost Sicilian. I hope Sir Terence Burns [the Treasury permanent secretary] has got over that period of ire."

Questions also remain about some of the organisations the Arts Council funds. It gives the literary periodical, the *London Review of Books*, £28,104. Asked why a commercial journal, on sale in the high streets,

should be funded by the taxpayer, Lord Gowrie replied: "It's a knotty question, that. There's a problem that many publications are in the hands of commercial organisations. But the LRB does advance the cause of literature."

In the new set of grants, the big, nationally funded companies suffered worse from the £1.5m cut, from £186.1m to £184.6m, as the Arts Council tightened its belt.

The South Bank Board, Royal Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet and Royal Opera all lost cash as their multi-million grants were too substantial to be spared the cuts, the Arts Council said.

More than £112,000 has been trimmed from the South Bank Board's £13.3m allocation, £100,000 from the Royal Ballet's £6.56m, £54,720 from the Birmingham Royal Ballet's £5.47m, £31,200 from the English National Ballet, £9,800 from the Northern Ballet Theatre and £39,970 from the Royal Opera company's £7.99m. But most arts organisations will get the same in cash terms as last year, and some organisations will get slightly more.

The debt-ridden English National Opera escapes cuts because of a stabilisation plan, and the National Theatre (£11.1m) and Royal Shakespeare Theatre (£8.47m) also have standstill funding.

Acting secretary general Graham Devlin said: "Although we hope the forthcoming changes to the lottery rules will allow more flexibility for the arts funding system, they will not solve all our problems."

The Arts Council would carry out a review into the organisations it supported and its funding methods, he said. "Most of the companies on the list are in very grave difficulties and are right at the edge of survival."



Point taken: Regional and national ballet companies were among those to suffer cuts as a result of the Arts Council's revenue crisis
Photograph: Laurie Lewis



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Ministers face crunch over funds for Tube

London Underground needs money desperately. But months of Whitehall wrangling has produced nothing.
Randeep Ramesh, Transport Correspondent, examines the looming clash between John Prescott and Gordon Brown.

With two forthcoming White Papers, on transport and the capital's future government, a decision on the Tube cannot be delayed.

The Tube, which ferries more than 1.6 million people every day, is falling apart and in dire need of cash. Next year it will receive £300m for its "core" operations. That is £50m short of the amount needed just to stop the rot. To clear the "investment backlog", the service needs more than £1bn.

With no public cash available, three sets of city experts have been drafted in to help solve the problem of how to inject private capital into the Tube. John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister whose brief covers transport, hired Price Waterhouse to find an answer. The accountants recommended splitting the infrastructure into four parts and selling 51 per cent stakes to the private sector.

Mr Prescott disagreed. He had in mind two options. One would be to relax the Treasury borrowing requirements—allowing a public sector Tube to borrow money from the City without adding to the national debt. As the public sector body makes an operating profit of £170m a

year, it has the money to borrow with. Other cities—most notably New York—use this method to fund subway schemes, but the Treasury is not impressed.

Another Prescott plan was to lease all the infrastructure—the tunnels and the tracks—to one company for 30 years. The only firm big enough to handle that large a contract is Railtrack, which offered ministers a minority stake in the company in return.

Geoffrey Robinson, the Treasury minister dealing with Mr Prescott, turned to four big businessmen. They advised Mr Robinson to split the Underground infrastructure into three companies and franchise them and the train operators—such as the Victoria Line—to the private sector. Mr Prescott is unlikely to wear this.

Lazards, the merchant bank hired by LU, has come up with an analysis to bury arguments that advocate any break-up. The bankers instead propose either a privatised monopoly or a public one that operates "on commercial terms".

Meanwhile, Downing Street appears ready to "bash heads together". Geoff Norris, the No 10 policy adviser on transport, opposes state control and favours a quick sell-off. A decision has been stated for the end of this month.

Any move to sell-off the underground will anger the unions. Jimmy Knapp, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, said: "I find it astonishing that when the media is full of stories condemning privatised rail services, Treasury officials are advocating the same policy for London Underground. It makes absolutely no sense."

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Room with a view: Elizabeth Buttle's farmhouse in Cwmann village. She has taken refuge with her daughter

Photograph: Wales News and Pictures

Oldest mother brings media circus to quiet corner of Wales

Somehow woodcarver Nancy Hemming had managed to miss out on all the gossip. Richard Smith visited her hilltop cottage overlooking the ruggedly beautiful sheep farming village Cwmann in west Wales, which just happens to be the home of Elizabeth Buttle, Britain's oldest mum.

Since it was revealed that a 60-year-old farmer had given birth two months ago to a boy called Joe - nicknamed "Skipper" - tongues have been wagging as

never before and Cwmann has become a far-flung scenic setting for the latest media frenzy.

But Nancy Hemming had remained blissfully unaware, until yesterday. "Oh well, that's nice," she said. "I don't have a television and I don't read the papers. I just listen to Radio Four so I hadn't heard anything about it. But I think she must have an amazing amount of courage to start having children again at 60."

Birth is always a prime topic on everyone's lips in Cwmann at this time of year. But the talk is usually about the offspring thousands of speckle-faced ewes will produce when lambing gets into full swing during March.

Red kites and buzzards still soar above the hilltops but most of the rain-sodden fields are deserted because farmers have put their flocks indoors to protect them from the worst ravages of winter.

Villagers struggled to remember the last time Cwmann hit the headlines: a Land-Rover was used in a ram-raid at the local garage and an RAF jet crashed into a nearby mountain. But the biggest scandal involved a local farmer who was jailed for sexual activities with a donkey and some pigs.

Cwmann (pop 600) stands 950 feet above sea level and boasts a primary school, a village post office and four pubs. Most people find work on the farms, at a large slaughter house in nearby Llanfyllter, or at the light industrial units in Lampeter.

Yesterday, Elizabeth Buttle was still staying out of the limelight at her 40-year-old daughter Belinda Pleavin's home four miles away. But a member of her family claimed she had sold her story to the *News of the World* for £100,000.

She keeps horses, cattle and sheep on the 97-acre spread. Her grandson, Nick Pleavin, 19, said: "The baby has completely changed my gran's life. She is much jollier now."

"The baby sleeps in the bed with her. She started off breastfeeding him but he drinks milk from a bottle now. He is quite chubby and doesn't cry much. His hair started off blonde but it's going a bit ginger now."

"She is very proud of Joey and shows him off to everyone. He has a little yellow teddy bear in his cot which my gran bought

him for Christmas. Although I'm his uncle he is just like a little brother to me."

"My youngest brother Matthew is five and mum has given gran the babygrow he wore when he was little. Gran is a hard worker who has gained all her life. She was offered a lot of money by the paper and you can do what you like with that."

"I know she wants to get laser treatment for her eyes in Russia which will cost her £3,000."

There was no sign of the baby's father, Peter Rawstrom, 38, who runs a fodder merchants business with his wife Vera, 56 - mother of his four other children - from their home in Llangybi, five miles from Cwmann.

But the reporters, photographers and television crews, who have made their base at the Talfarn Jen inn on the edge of the village, were still looking.



Elizabeth Buttle: Very proud of baby Joe

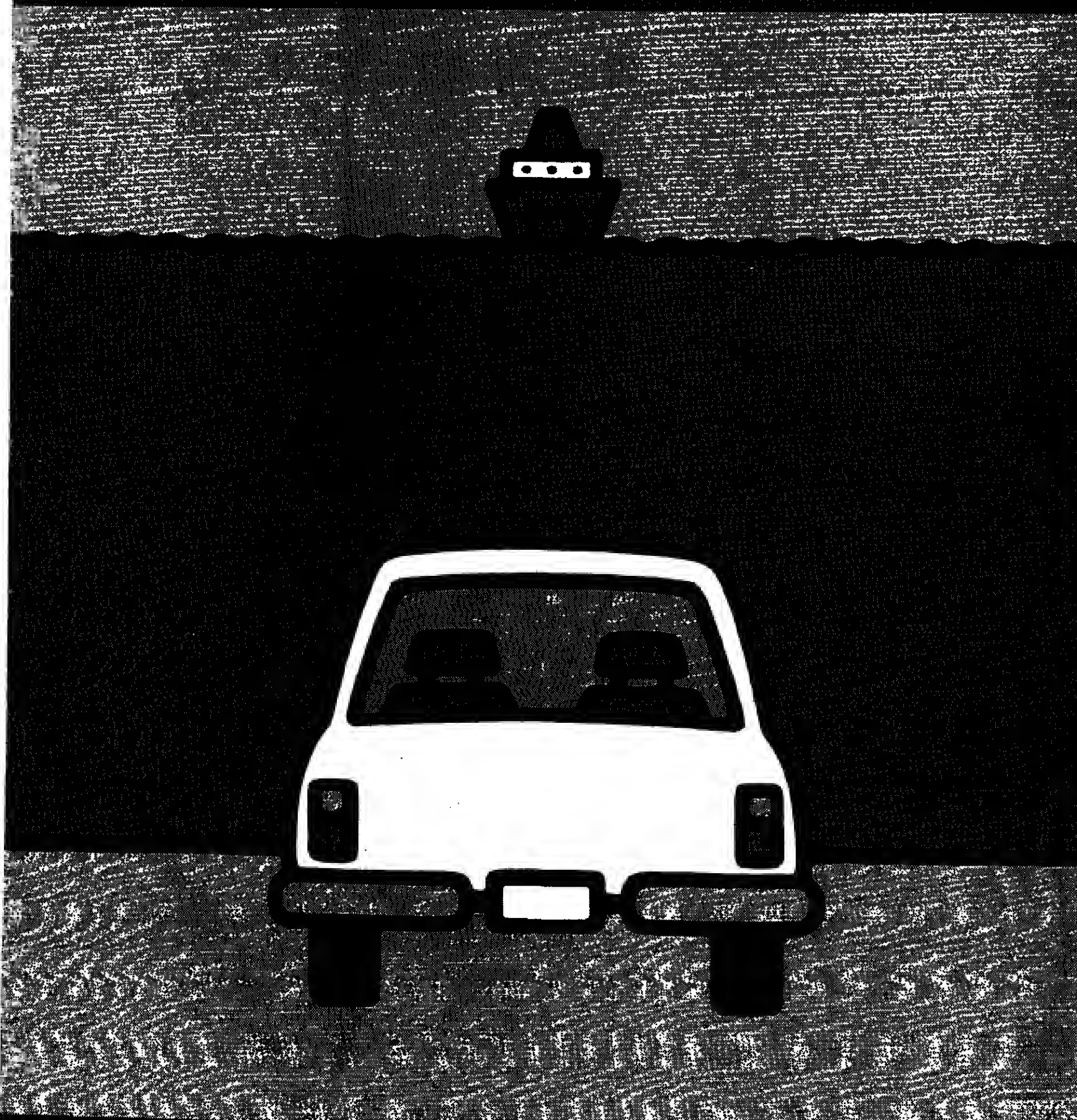
Judith and Tom Newman, who moved from Croydon a year ago when they bought the pub, said it had made their week.

"Some days we can sit here for five hours in winter and take 78p but on Wednesday our takings were £300," said Mrs Newman. "Nobody believed Liz was pregnant at first. Some people knew and others didn't. People were thinking, is she or isn't she."

"Liz has always been a very private person and an extremely hard worker. I admire her. As a woman on your own you have to be tough to run a hill farm and have a small baby."

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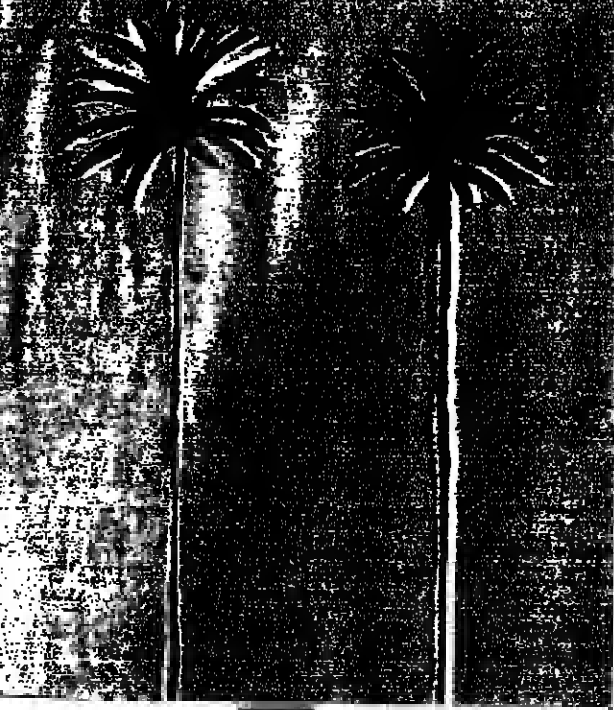


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11/IN THE COURTS

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 17 JANUARY 1998
11



Trial of strength: Richard Branson (left) and Guy Snowden arriving at the High Court for yesterday's hearing



Photographs: Karl Prouse

Trial halted as rape case girl breaks down

A 10-year-old girl allegedly raped and indecently assaulted by a gang of classmates repeatedly broke down yesterday during the Old Bailey trial of the four boys she claims attacked her.

Giving evidence over a video link on the second day of the hearing, she became increasingly distressed and tired amid cross-examination by lawyers defending the schoolboys.

At one stage, while being questioned by Steven Kay QC about the alleged incident at their London primary school in May last year, she began sobbing uncontrollably. The hearing was adjourned several times to allow her to have a break.

She was told by the judge, Mrs Justice Bracewell: "I don't want you to get upset. Mr Kay and others have to ask questions and I am here to see the questions are fair. If they are not I'll stop them."

"I know it may be upsetting for you when sometimes you are asked about something you don't agree about. Try not to get upset."

The two 10-year-old boys standing trial at the Old Bailey for allegedly raping the girl, then aged nine, are believed to be the youngest-ever rape defendants in Britain. They are also accused with two other boys, aged 10 and

11, of indecently assaulting the girl.

The prosecution case is that they dragged her into lavatories at their school, forcibly stripped her and then fondled her before three boys took it in turns to rape her as the others looked on and laughed.

A third boy alleged to have raped her could not be prosecuted as he was nine at the time and under the age of criminal responsibility.

At the start of yesterday's hearing, the girl told the court she had previously been raped and sexually attacked by a group of men in Jamaica. She said she was raped in the home of a man and three of his friends before she came to England four years ago. She spoke haltingly as she began her evidence.

She was being cared for by her aunt and grandmother in Jamaica while her mother was in England.

The court was not told how old the girl was at the time, but she said she was not attending school when a neighbour, aged about 30, took her to his house and raped and beat her.

She said: "He looked like he was mad."

Mr Kay, defending one of the boys, said: "Did the man harm you?" Looking down, the girl

whispered: "Yes, sometimes. Sometimes he took girls to his house."

Asked what the man did, she said: "He got his friends and they hurt us and after they hurt us he hit us and he hurt us with his finger and he slapped us round the face. He hit and hit us and beat us with sticks."

When it was repeatedly suggested by counsel that she had made the rape allegation up she said: "I told you everything I know and everything I remember and everything I did."

She told the jury: "I don't make up stories."

The accused sat with their legal teams and their families. One of the boys occupied the time during much of the cross-examination of his alleged victim by using a legal notepad to sketch reporters taking down the girl's evidence. Another sucked his thumb.

The morning session was adjourned early after the girl told the court: "I am getting upset because I am tired."

The girl again broke down just minutes after the court resumed for the afternoon.

Just 15 minutes into the session, the girl began crying, saying: "I'm tired."

The trial was adjourned until Monday.

My reputation is everything, Branson tells libel jury

Richard Branson told the High Court in London yesterday that he had brought his libel action because of the millions of people who put their trust in him.

The 47-year-old entrepreneur, who is suing a director of Camelot over an alleged bribe in the race to win the UK lottery franchise, said that in life "all you have is your reputation both personally and in business".

"In business I have literally millions of people who put their trust in me every year, who put their lives with me in flying on planes and going on trains and who invest their money with us. And I think people have to trust you. If there's ever any question mark over your integrity, I think it's very important that one defends that."

Mr Branson is suing Guy Snowden, the head of US lottery company GTEch - which holds 22 per cent of Camelot - and its PR director, Robert

Rendine, for claiming he made the bribery allegation when he knew there was insufficient evidence to support it.

Mr Snowden, 52, is alleged to have made the offer at a lunch at Mr Branson's home in Holland Park, west London, in September 1993 in an attempt to get the Virgin boss to withdraw his consortium's rival bid.

For his part, he is suing Mr Branson for making the allegation on a BBC *Panorama* programme in December 1995.

Mr Branson told Mr Justice Morland and the jury that the litigation was not another "Virgin product" aimed at commercial profit or publicity. "There is nothing to gain except getting the truth out."

He had issued his writs because he had been accused of being a liar "in the strongest possible terms". And he added: "I thought that was unpleasant and quite hurtful".

Cross examined by Richard Ferguson QC, for Mr Snowden, Mr Branson denied that he had "embellished" his account of what he claimed Mr Snowden had said to him in order to strengthen his case.

"There's nothing that needs strengthening in this case. I do not embellish things."

Mr Ferguson suggested that by the time the litigation was launched, Mr Branson had realised that the account of the conversation which he had written in a notebook on the day of the lunch was capable of a perfectly innocent explanation.

Mr Branson replied: "I had no difficulty whatsoever in remembering the words that Mr Snowden told me at that lunch. It was not every day that you get attempted to be bribed."

"I was absolutely and utterly clear about what Mr Snowden was saying to me."

The case continues.

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Montreal struggles out of a modern-day ice age

Eastern Canada is slowly returning to normal after a huge ice storm. Nearly a million people have been left without electricity, and thousands have been stranded.

Dazed Quebecers, no strangers to ferocious winters, are still shaking their heads in disbelief. Out of the blue, their normal, sophisticated 20th-century life has simply been suspended and they have been returned, literally, to the ice age.

At the worst stage, 3 million people, half the entire population of Quebec, were plunged into darkness and cold as the power system collapsed. Montreal, the second largest city in Canada, of more than 2 million inhabitants, became a ghost-town as the entire downtown commercial and business centre was suddenly blacked out. Thousands of office workers stumbling out in shock onto surreally dark streets found that the metro had also ground to a halt, its power shorted. For once, apocalyptic banner headlines reading "c'est l'enfer" ("it's hell") in local papers were entirely justified.

Now, 13 days after the start of the "storm of the century", life, at least in major urban areas, is slowly and patchily starting to return to a semblance of normality. But 350,000 households - more than a million people - in Quebec (and thousands more in New Brunswick and Eastern Ontario), are still without light, water or heat.

This is particularly serious as temperatures have plummeted to as low as minus 20C and tens of thousands have had to evacuate their freezing homes for temporary shelters in schools, gyms, synagogues and libraries, heated by generators - and they still don't know when they can return home. The devastation is awe-inspiring: some 600 giant transmission towers have crumpled like giant toys, while tens of thousands of broken pylons and electrical poles litter the snow-covered ground in every direction. Snapped, ice-encrusted cables trail and loop across roads still blocked with branches and trees that toppled under the sheer weight of the ice.

A freak five days of freezing rain coated power lines with up to four inches of ice, many times more weight than they could support. And as they collapsed and short-

ed, they overloaded other parts of the system which also blew, in a domino effect.

At one stage, four out of five links of the so-called "ring of power" surrounding Montreal, which supplies the city's electricity, collapsed. The entire city and surrounding area came within a hair's breadth of being blacked out, according to Lucien Bouchard, the Premier.

They have still not been repaired, making the whole system highly vulnerable, even though some temporary ancillary lines have now been hastily set up. But this fragility has meant that most businesses, factories and stores and all schools, universities and government offices have remained closed for a second week.

The Premier appealed to businesses to stay closed until last Thursday to prevent the system overloading (as happened again on Monday). Hydro-Quebec, the company that runs the power network, is still

BY SUSIE MORGAN

rationing electricity by "powershedding" (prolonged cuts), to conserve energy until more lines can be restored.

But by far the worst-affected area is Montreal's densely populated South Shore and areas further south, dubbed the "triangle of darkness", where thousands of households, and entire sizeable towns, are still cut off.

Nearly 10,000 Canadian troops have been drafted in to help with one of the country's worst natural disasters. General Maurice Baril, the armed forces chief, compared the scene of devastation on the South Shore to "Sarejevo without the bullets".

Hydro Quebec workers, battling round the clock to restore power with the help of the army and of American crews who have been called in from as far away as Connecticut, say the damage to electrical towers, pylons and power lines is so bad that the grid infrastructure will have to be completely rebuilt, rather than just repaired.

American workers battling in Arctic conditions say they are appalled at the conditions and at the extent of the damage. "I've

never in 40 years in this job seen anything like it," said one whose truck was practically covered with an American flag.

Now police and troops are making urgent door-to-door searches for people, especially the elderly, who are still staying in their freezing homes. They are trying to persuade them to leave for shelters, afraid of the very real danger of hypothermia in the savage cold (there have already been several deaths).

There are also grave dangers from carbon monoxide poisoning as people have been desperately trying to heat their homes with unsuitable devices like portable barbecues. Already an astounding 600 people have been hospitalised after falling ill from the insidious, odourless gas, and nine have died.

Meanwhile, the troops, the biggest number ever mobilised in peacetime, have been given police powers to patrol blacked-out evacuated areas to prevent looting and vandalism and to make arrests.

At times Montreal seems to be on a war footing - an impression reinforced by military helicopters landing uniformed troops in city suburbs and military trucks trundling down the snow and ice-clogged streets.

The sense of crisis is reinforced by daily live broadcasts by police, security and Hydro-Quebec officials, and by Premier Lucien Bouchard, giving crisis updates, warnings, advice, and help - and blanket coverage of the storm on television and radio which has totally taken over from normal programming.

Practical advice - helpline for those worst affected, and for the luckier citizens to donate blankets, food and provide beds and shelter - provides a real lifeline. So, too, do addresses for shelters and for cafés and restaurants offering free food and hot drinks, and hotels offering to put people up at cut rates.

Hearteningly, there has been a tremendous outpouring of sympathy and support - 15 offers for every one person needing a bed - and thousands are working as volunteers at shelters where, after nearly two weeks, people are exhausted, stressed, fractious and depressed. Some refugees house as many as 2,000 people, including children and even sometimes pets.

"I just want to go home," is the refrain heard everywhere, "but I can't and I don't know when I can".



A woman making her way past huge blocs of ice in downtown Montreal this week

Photograph: Paul Chasson/AP

Republicans in bid to repair rift as abortion returns to US agenda

Abortion is back on the US political agenda, with a damaging public split in the Republican Party and old arguments rekindled by the 25th anniversary of the judgment that made abortion a constitutional right. Even as the arguments rage, however, Mary Dejesky in Washington finds signs that the tide of opinion may be turning.

The National Committee of the Republican Party, which approves policy and controls funds, was set for a bitter debate at its annual meeting in California yesterday, the like of which had not been seen in years. The issue was whether party funds should be used to support election candidates who do not subscribe to the party's out-and-out opposition to "partial birth abortion" - a technique for late abortion that critics regard as a particularly cruel form of infanticide.

Party policy is to have the procedure outlawed and two bills have been passed by Con-

gress, only to be vetoed by President Clinton. Public opinion polls find that more than 80 per cent of Americans oppose the procedure. Pictures provided by lobbyists are gruesome.

A small minority of Congressmen and candidates on the liberal wing of the party, however, regard the hue and cry as the thin end of the anti-abortion wedge - a means of eventually drumming up enough support to remove women's right to abortion altogether - and steadfastly refuse to condemn it.

Last month, ardent foes of abortion petitioned the party's

National Committee to have these "dissidents" deprived of central campaign funds, a sanction that could would impair, if not ruin, their election prospects. With the mid-term congressional elections to be held this autumn, the sanction was a real threat.

The campaign got up a head of steam before the Republican Party leadership sounded the alarm. The result was an emergency propaganda blitz appealing for party unity-inclusion not exclusion.

They argued that making attitudes to partial birth abortion a "litmus test" for obtaining cen-

tral funds laid the party open to lobbying on other issues. How about a "litmus test" on other issues, like free trade? A litmus test for donors? There were whispers of Stalinism, democratic centralism and thought dictatorship. For the more traditional, patrician (and shrinking) wing of the party, there was the further consideration that abortion - even such a repellent practice as partial birth abortion - was a matter for individual conscience, not party politics.

Behind these objections, however, were other, practical, ones. A number of prominent

congressional and local Republican candidates could risk defeat, not only because of inadequate funding, but because in some constituencies "pro-choice" voters might switch to the rival Democrat. Unspoken was the further consideration that the women's vote - which already favours the Democrats - could decline further. By yesterday, with television advertisements calling for Republican "inclusiveness" still running, the funding motion was confidently expected to fail, but it was a close call.

This defeat, and the practical considerations behind it,

reinforced an impression that the vicious passion that has for so long fuelled the abortion debate in America may be starting to wane, along with the role of fundamentalist Christian movements in US politics.

Opinion polls conducted for the 25th anniversary of *Roe v Wade* - the Supreme Court ruling that gave US women the constitutional right, albeit limited, to an abortion - suggest something similar.

Although lobbyists on both sides use the polls, for their own reasons, to show that anti-abortion sentiment has hardened, this is not the whole story. The

polls also show solid public support for the view that abortion should be a legal right. In other words, increased public censure co-exists with acceptance - an acceptance that could not be taken for granted 25 years ago.

The anniversary of *Roe v Wade* falls next week, and lobbyists on both sides have been enthusiastically fighting the old fights. But the real fear that stalked abortion clinics seems recently to have dissipated. Abortion doctors were unworried enough about their safety to hold an anniversary dinner dance last weekend.

Bundestag allows Big Brother into German homes

Germany broke with a post-war taboo yesterday by legalising police bugging of private homes. The law authorising eavesdropping was passed by just over two thirds of the Bundestag, clearing by only four votes the hurdle laid down for constitutional amendments.

If approved by the second chamber, the Bundesrat, German police officers will have similar rights and obligations as their colleagues in other European countries. Permission for such measures will have to be approved by courts individually, and can only be granted if they serve an ongoing investigation into serious crimes.

The homes of priests, lawyers and MPs will continue to be immune to electronic surveillance. Doctors, tax advisers and journalists may be bugged, but a court must decide afterwards whether the information can be used.

Critics say the measure gives law enforcement authorities a way to introduce evidence from doctors and others who now have the right to refuse testimony. A journalists' union has threatened to challenge the measure in the Constitutional Court.

Although the wording of the law is the result of all-party discussions, serious reservations exist both on the left and the libertarian right. The previous Justice Minister, Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, resigned because she strongly disagreed with the proposed Bill.

The ban on bugging was one of the last vestiges of the 1949 constitution drawn up with the specific purpose of preventing a recurrence of Nazism. As a result of that Basic Law, Germans have tended to enjoy more protection from Big Brother than citizens of most democracies.

— Imre Karacs, Bonn



The greatest: Muhammad Ali receives the Commander of the Arch at King Hassan's palace

Photograph: AFP

Boxing champion Ali adds Morocco's top honour to his trophies

King Hassan II has awarded former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali one of Morocco's top honours. During a ceremony on Thursday night in the Moroccan capital Rabat, Ali also received a copy of a cassette recording of the Koran.

The order of the Commander of the Arch is one of Morocco's most prestigious.

Ali, 54, arrived in Morocco earlier this week to attend religious ceremonies and discussions in celebration of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. He also opened a friendly football match between Mo-

rocco and Angola by kicking the first ball.

During the four-day visit, Ali, founder of the charity Global Village Champion, was to visit several orphanages and humanitarian organisations which help children.

— AP, Rabat

Killing of Serb sours Croat takeover

A Croat man has been charged with murder after shooting dead a Serb in the eastern region which was returned to Croatia after two years' of United Nations administration. The shooting occurred hours before the Croatian government and the United Nations highlighted reconciliation between Serbs and Croats in the former Serb enclave and pledged to help the two communities live together again.

The 50-year-old man, identified only by the initials M.C., shot a Serb man in the chest with a Kalashnikov rifle on Wednesday night, a month after he threw a hand grenade into a cafe, killing another Serb. "For the first time he was charged with 'endangering public safety with fatal consequences'," a UN spokesman said, adding that the U.N. mission in Eastern Slavonia was concerned with the light sentence since he had intentionally thrown a hand grenade.

— Reuters, Vukovar

Italy gets back its ancient corpse

The frozen remains of a prehistoric man, believed to be the oldest mummy in the world, were returned to Italy, ending a six-year custody dispute with neighbouring Austria. The two nations have been squabbling over the 5,300-year-old corpse since 1991 when it was found by tourists on the Similaun glacier in the Oetz valley and whisked off to Innsbruck by a team of Austrian experts.

— Reuters, Bolzano

Fears grow over Belgian mass killings

Belgian police said the seven bodies found hurried at the house of Andras Pandy did not include any of his missing family members, raising fears the death-toll could go as high as 13. Pandy, a Protestant pastor of Hungarian descent, has been accused of murdering two of his wives and four children and police were surprised when DNA showed none of the seven bodies found belonged to his family.

— AP, Brussels

Not-guilty plea at war-crimes court

A Bosnian Croat injured in a shoot-out with Nato troops last month pleaded not guilty to taking part in the killing of a Bosnian Muslim woman. Vlatko Kupreskic, who was wounded after opening fire on the Dutch troops who arrested him, was making his first appearance before judges of the U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

— Reuters, The Hague

Finnish PM to remarry

Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen will remarry this month to a long-time companion 25 years his junior. The 56-year old prime minister, whose daughter from his first marriage made him a grandfather last week, got engaged to history teacher Paivi Hertzberg, 31, on Christmas Eve.

— Reuters, Helsinki

15/PROMOTION

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 17 JANUARY 1998

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easyJet

The Independent and Independent on Sunday, in association with easyJet are offering readers the chance to fly to Europe from an incredible £34 return or £22 one way (all prices include airport tax).

This offer is available between 21 February and 4 September 1998. Choose from Barcelona, Nice, Amsterdam, Geneva or Palma and in Scotland, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen or Inverness. Flights to all destinations are from London Luton, while you can also travel to Nice and Amsterdam from Liverpool airport as well.

If you live in Scotland you can fly from any of the Scottish airports mentioned above, to London Luton from £34 return (including airport tax).

The prices for travel are divided into three bands - travel between 21 February and 28 March are Band A, while travel between 29 March and 4 September is divided into peak, (Band C) and off peak (Band B). If you want to travel off peak then use the grid to advise you of the best times to fly.

The price grid shows the cost of a one way flight to each destination. If you choose to travel to a particular destination in band A, then you may find it is a different price to bands B or C.

How to book

Simply collect 12 differently numbered tokens from The Independent and Independent on Sunday (You must have 2 tokens from The Independent on Sunday, tokens will be printed until Friday 23 January). If you missed last week's tokens it is not too late to start collecting - we will be printing 2 tokens per day until Friday 23rd January.

Decide when and where you want to travel. You can book for up to five people with the one set of tokens as long as all passengers are travelling together. You can book up to two separate single or return journeys for up to 5 people - but each application must be accompanied by 12 differently numbered tokens.

On Saturday 24 January we will print a telephone number which you should use to book your flight.

You must book at least three weeks before you fly.

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DESTINATION	BAND A FEB 21 - MARCH 28		BAND B MARCH 29 - SEPT 4 OFF-PEAK		BAND C MARCH 29 - SEPT 4 PEAK	
	Outbound (£)	Inbound (£)	Outbound (£)	Inbound (£)	Outbound (£)	Inbound (£)
Barcelona	22.00	12.00	34.50	24.50	39.50	29.50
Palma	22.00	12.00	29.50	19.50	44.50	34.50
Nice	22.00	14.70	24.50	17.20	39.50	32.20
Amsterdam	22.00	15.20	24.50	17.70	34.50	27.70
Geneva	22.00	19.00	24.50	21.50	34.50	31.50
Edinburgh	22.00	12.00	22.00	12.00	24.50	14.50
Aberdeen	22.00	12.00	22.00	12.00	24.50	14.50
Glasgow	22.00	12.00	22.00	12.00	24.50	14.50
Inverness	22.00	12.00	22.00	12.00	24.50	14.50

*Prices from London Luton and Liverpool are the same.

To calculate the return price add the outbound and inbound fares together.

Flights between 29 March and 4 September have different prices for peak and off-peak travel. If you want to travel off-peak, choose to travel at less popular times. This guide will help.

OFF-PEAK TIME ADVICE GUIDE

There are only very few off peak flights in July and August. Weekend flights will be very popular - be prepared to take alternative mid week flights.

If offer fares are not available at a particular time, a normal priced seat can be bought in conjunction with an offer seat.

There are no off-peak seats available on popular flights such as bank holiday weekends.

Here's more specific advice for more popular destinations

Barcelona: There are no off-peak flights in July or August.

Palma: July and August are especially popular.

Nice: Off-peak travel is only available in April.

Geneva: Saturday travel before Easter is especially popular.

Inverness: There is no off-peak travel in August.

Exclusions: You cannot fly with our offer during these times:

All destinations: 9-14 April; 1-4 May; 22-25 May; 28-31 August.

Liverpool-Nice: 2-4 March; 20-23 May; 14 June.

Nice-Liverpool: 4-6 March; 25-26 May; 16 June.

London Luton-Nice: 3-4 March; 20-23 May; 13-14 June.

Nice-London Luton: 24-26 May; 16 June.

London Luton-Edinburgh: 21-22 March.

Edinburgh-London Luton: 22-23 March.

London Luton-Barcelona: 7-10 May.

Barcelona-London Luton: 10-11 May.

You cannot travel on flights scheduled to depart after 2pm on Fridays and Sundays.

BAND A: FEBRUARY 21 - MARCH 28

LONDON LUTON - EDINBURGH		Edinburgh to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	0710 0825	0710 0825	0710 0825
Saturday	0820 0935	0820 0935	0820 0935
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Mon-Friday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Saturday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825

LONDON LUTON - GLASGOW		Glasgow to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	0815 0930	0815 0930	0815 0930
Saturday	1515 1630	1515 1630	1515 1630
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Mon-Friday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Saturday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825

LONDON LUTON - ABERDEEN		Aberdeen to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	0815 0930	0815 0930	0815 0930
Saturday	1515 1630	1515 1630	1515 1630
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Mon-Friday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Saturday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825

LONDON LUTON - PALMA		Palma to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505
Saturday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505
Sunday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505

LONDON LUTON - INVERNESS		Inverness to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505
Saturday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505
Sunday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505

LONDON LUTON - AMSTERDAM		Amsterdam to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	0815 0930	0815 0930	0815 0930
Saturday	1515 1630	1515 1630	1515 1630
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Mon-Friday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Saturday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825

BAND B/BAND C: MARCH 29 - SEPTEMBER 4

LONDON LUTON - EDINBURGH		Edinburgh to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	0715 0824	0715 0824	0715 0824
Saturday	0815 0928	0815 0928	0815 0928
Sunday	1509 1915	1509 1915	1509 1915
Mon-Friday	1509 1915	1509 1915	1509 1915
Saturday	1509 1915	1509 1915	1509 1915
Sunday	1509 1915	1509 1915	1509 1915

LONDON LUTON - GLASGOW		Glasgow to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	0815 0927	0815 0927	0815 0927
Saturday	1509 1915	1509 1915	1509 1915
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Mon-Friday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Saturday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825

LONDON LUTON - ABERDEEN		Aberdeen to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	0815 0927	0815 0927	0815 0927
Saturday	1509 1915	1509 1915	1509 1915
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Mon-Friday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Saturday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825

LONDON LUTON - PALMA		Palma to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505
Saturday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505
Sunday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505

LONDON LUTON - INVERNESS		Inverness to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505
Saturday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505
Sunday	1140 1505	1140 1505	1140 1505

LONDON LUTON - AMSTERDAM		Amsterdam to London Luton	
Day of travel	Dep. Arr.	Day of travel	Dep. Arr.
Mon-Friday	0815 0930	0815 0930	0815 0930
Saturday	1515 1630	1515 1630	1515 1630
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Mon-Friday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Saturday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825
Sunday	1815 1825	1815 1825	1815 1825

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TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. To qualify to apply for flights under this promotion readers must collect 12 differently numbered tokens from those printed in The Independent and the Independent on Sunday.
2. There are 50,000 seats available and they will be sold on a first come first served basis. Bookings are made subject to availability.
3. Neither EasyJet or Newspaper Publishing plc can be held responsible for callers who cannot get through to the booking line.
4. Token holders aged 18 and over are entitled to purchase return flights for up to 5 people in one booking with one complete set of tokens for use on qualifying EasyJet flights only. Each return flight from either London Luton or Liverpool represents a booking and there is a maximum of 2 bookings per person. Each booking requires a complete set of tokens. Applications for more than 1 person are valid only when they are travelling at the same time, from the same airport to the same destination and where applicable, returning on the same flight.
5. Passengers under 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Infants aged 23 months or less determined by the age on the date of travel - can travel free of charge on condition that they share the same seat of travel as the adult accompanying them. Only one infant may accompany each adult.
6. Passengers are responsible for obtaining and possessing (if appropriate) valid passports, visas and insurance. It is strongly recommended that passengers take out insurance. All passengers travelling on in-

ternational flights must have a valid 10 year passport and necessary visas. All passengers travelling on domestic flights must have valid identification e.g. passport, driving licence or credit card.
7. A fully completed collector form with 12 differently numbered tokens does not represent an entitlement to travel on a specific route on a specific date.
8. Collector forms and tokens are non transferable, have no cash value and must be surrendered when checking in for the initial flight. All bookings issued are non transferable and non refundable.
9. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.
10. One special telephone booking number will be printed in The Independent on Saturday 24 January 1998, and repeated on Sunday 25 January 1998. You can only book flights using this number. Please do not call easyJet on any other number or Newspaper Publishing plc as your booking will not be accepted.
11. Bookings for flights will only be taken by phone between 21 January and 5 February 1998 inclusive. Bookings will only be taken between 9pm and 11pm Monday - Friday and between 12 noon and 10pm on Saturdays and Sundays during this period.
12. Calls will be charged at the national call rate.
13. All outward and return travel must be taken between 21 February and 4 September 1998 inclusive subject to the exclusions listed in condition 14 below.

14. The excluded periods for condition 13 are:
(a) Travel on Fridays and Sundays scheduled to commence after 2.15pm.
(b) Travel between 9-14 April, 1-4 May, 22-25 May, 28-31 August.
(c) Travel from Liverpool - Nice 2-4 March, 20-23 May, 14 June. Nice to Liverpool on 4-6 March, 25-26 May, 16 June. London Luton - Nice 3-4 March, 20-23 May, 13-14 June. Nice to London Luton 24-26 May, 16 June.
(d) London Luton - Edinburgh 21-22 March. Edinburgh to London Luton 22-23 March.
(e) London Luton - Barcelona 7-10 May, Barcelona to London Luton 10-11 May.
15. Payment for tickets under this promotion may only be made by Switch, Mastercard, Visa, American Express, or Delta cards on the telephone at the time of booking. Payment by cash or cheque will not be accepted.
16. All outbound flights must originate in the UK and in the case of European flights they must be from either London Luton or Liverpool airports.
17. No alterations, refunds or exchanges will be permitted after a booking has been accepted. All flights and schedules are subject to change without prior notice. Previous bookings made prior to this promotion and for use during the period of this promotion cannot be exchanged or refunded for any ticket acquired under this promotion. You must book at least three weeks before you fly.
18. EasyJet reserve the right not to accept multiple applications and bulk applications for trade or social groups.

19. EasyJet's conditions of carriage apply to all flights booked on the Promotion and shall prevail in the event of any inconsistency with the terms of the Promotion. EasyJet reserves the right to vary its conditions of carriage. Copies are available at EasyJet sales points.
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How the flying pigs became a crackling good tale

Even *Thought For The Day* caught swine fever. The subject for Radio 4's religious slot yesterday was the fugitive Tamworth pigs whose fate, a worthy godslot contributor informed us, has gripped the imagination of the nation.

Excuse me. Yes, I know that the august *Guardian* yesterday used the same phrase on its front page, and without apparent irony. The tabloid papers have given over page after page to the subject. *News at Ten* has revealed in a story which might have been tailor-made for its "And Finally..." slot. And there's the rub. But before we come to that, for those readers

BY PAUL VALLELY

who have today returned from holiday in a less sentimental clime, here is the story so far.

Nine days ago two Ginger Tamworth pigs escaped as they were being transferred from a van into an abattoir yard in Malmesbury. They ran round the yard before forcing their way through a hole in the fence and ran off across the road into the fields opposite. Confronted by the barrier of the River Avon, they dived into the icy waters and swam to freedom. They then went to ground in the gardens of the town.

Their owner, a council road sweeper with the improbable name of Arnaldo Dijulio, who had reared them for slaughter on his smallholding, tried to catch them, as did other locals, but they ran off with a surprising turn of speed whenever anyone tried to get hold of them.

So much for the facts. Had it been France, Germany or Italy, or more especially the United States, someone would then have got a gun and shot them. There would have been no news.

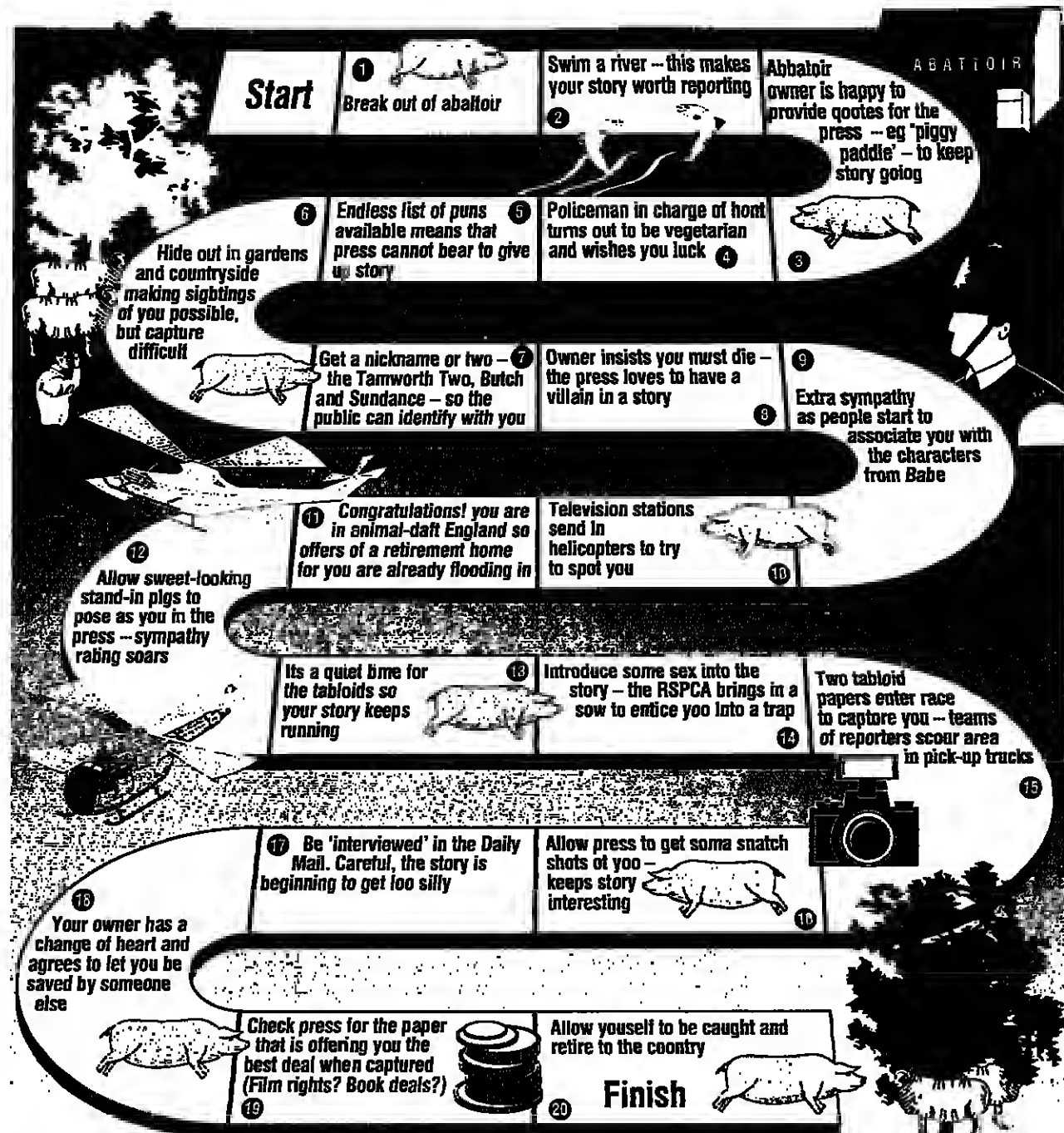
But this is Britain. When reports filtered through to London teams of newshounds were dispatched. They chased the unhappy animals on foot, by car, in hired four-wheel drives. ITN even sent a helicopter. The pigs were variously named - Fred and Ginger, Babe and Algy, Butch and Sundance and, more universally, the Tamworth Two.

The papers and the local RSPCA office proclaimed themselves to be inundated with calls from people offering money to save the beasts. A mystified Mr Dijulio suddenly found himself being offered as much as £15,000 for his pigs which the week before would have fetched him £40 a piece.

The tabloids filled double-page spreads with terrible puns. "Squal meet again" said hacks who declared themselves to be "on the pig's tail" in an attempt to capture the "cheeky swine" and then take them to an animal sanctuary where the might live "high on the hog". And on it went, liberally illustrated with photos of "Ginger Tamworths, like the one above".

The broadsheets carried more discursive pieces, sprinkled with references to George Orwell and Lord Emsworth but nonetheless managed to fill prodigious amounts of column inches. The men on the telly, deprived at first of actual pictures of their prey and forced to create their own images where none existed, resorted to codding up "great white hunter" scoops to which reporters, equipped with metaphorical stout sticks, felt the temperature of the spoor freshly imprinted in the ground.

Dog bites man, you will recall, is no story in the British news lexicon. But this was pig



The grunt escape - or how to avoid the chop by becoming a media star

bites man, putatively at any rate for, as the papers kept informing us, the Tamworth Ginger could give you a nasty nip.

What is it about the British and animals? For we have been

here before. Remember Blackie the Donkey? He was rescued by the *Sun* from cruel Spaniards who wanted to kill him in 1987 in an annual ritual to mark the execution of a

rapist centuries ago, and then pinched by the *Daily Star* which took him to join 7,000 others in the Donkey Sanctuary in Sidmouth, Devon. Then there was the rabbit saved by an intrepid

Mail on Sunday reporter who ventured into the lair of Colonel Gaddafi to recover the pet, which had been abandoned when diplomats quit the British embassy during one of those

Libyan crises (we forget the crisis, you see, but not the rabbit).

I have, I must confess, forgotten the name of the Tripoli bunny. Which is probably why I am back on rabbit pie. "Once an animal has been given a name, it is difficult to eat it," according to Julia Berryman, a psychologist at Leicester University who has made a study of people's attachment to animals. "Pets [except goldfish] are invariably named, and you form a relationship with them," she said. So close that one third of pet-owners, her research shows, have a closer relationship with their pet than their spouse. "These pigs have stepped out of line. They have crossed over from being farm animals to companions. They have been given names. Once that happens you can't reverse the process."

This explains something of our ambivalence about creatures which one minute are just potential bacon sandwiches and the next have become stars. It was a swift transformation. The day that we first heard of the pigs we were, elsewhere in our newspapers, continuing to regard the pigs and Wiltshire in an altogether different light.

Wiltshire, you may recall, is at the centre of the row between the British and Italians over whether Parma ham, the most upmarket transmutation a pig can undergo, can legitimately be sliced in Wiltshire. The Parma Ham Consortium is seeking an injunction to prevent Asda from selling its meat cured in Parma but sliced and packaged in Chippenham. They might be better off just giving the hams cute little nicknames.

It goes further than that. We give them not just names, but personalities. Anthropomorphism has been a British weakness since the three little pigs first went to market. Small wonder that the device surfaced again this week. The *Evening Standard* printed the first "exclusive interview" with the Tam-

worth Two clad in dark glasses. The *Daily Mail* carried a wince-making "world exclusive" - complete with invented quotes which had they been from a person his editor would have wanted "improved". Even the *Times* printed a piece with pig quotes prefaced with expletives like "Pheh".

There were those who were not amused. "It's fantastically hypocritical," said Rev Professor Andrew Linzey, Fellow of Mansfield College, Oxford, who holds Britain's first academic post in animal theology. "Five hundred million animals are slaughtered every year and are treated with hideous cruelty - pigs have their teeth clipped with metal pliers and their tails pulled off."

But it's not the tabloids he blames, so much as Aristotle. "He was the first to say animals are there for our use, and then the idea came into Christianity via Thomas Aquinas who conceived an intellectual hierarchy from angels, men, women, animals and plants."

Such priorities became embedded in English culture and law. In the Seventies, Amnesty International financed experiments to torture pigs to find out whether certain kinds of torture could be used without damaging skin. In the 1980s, a man charged with cruelty to prawns successfully argued in court that they weren't sentient beings (he had thrown the live crustaceans on a hot plate and watched them jump). More recently the Nuffield Committee on xenotransplantation decided that it was ethical to use pigs for organ transplants but not primates like monkeys and apes because they were too close to human beings.

The Tamworth Two, both back in custody last night, were originally part of a three-pig group when they entered the abattoir. The third animal was, according to the butcher, "processed in the usual way." If only he'd had a name.

MINOTEL
Great Britain

INDEPENDENT
ON SATURDAY

CITY BREAK QUESTIONNAIRE

FIVE LAKES
Hotel, Golf & Country Club

WIN A MINOTEL OR FIVE LAKES WEEKEND BREAK



Herald House Hotel



Five Lakes Hotel Golf and Country Club

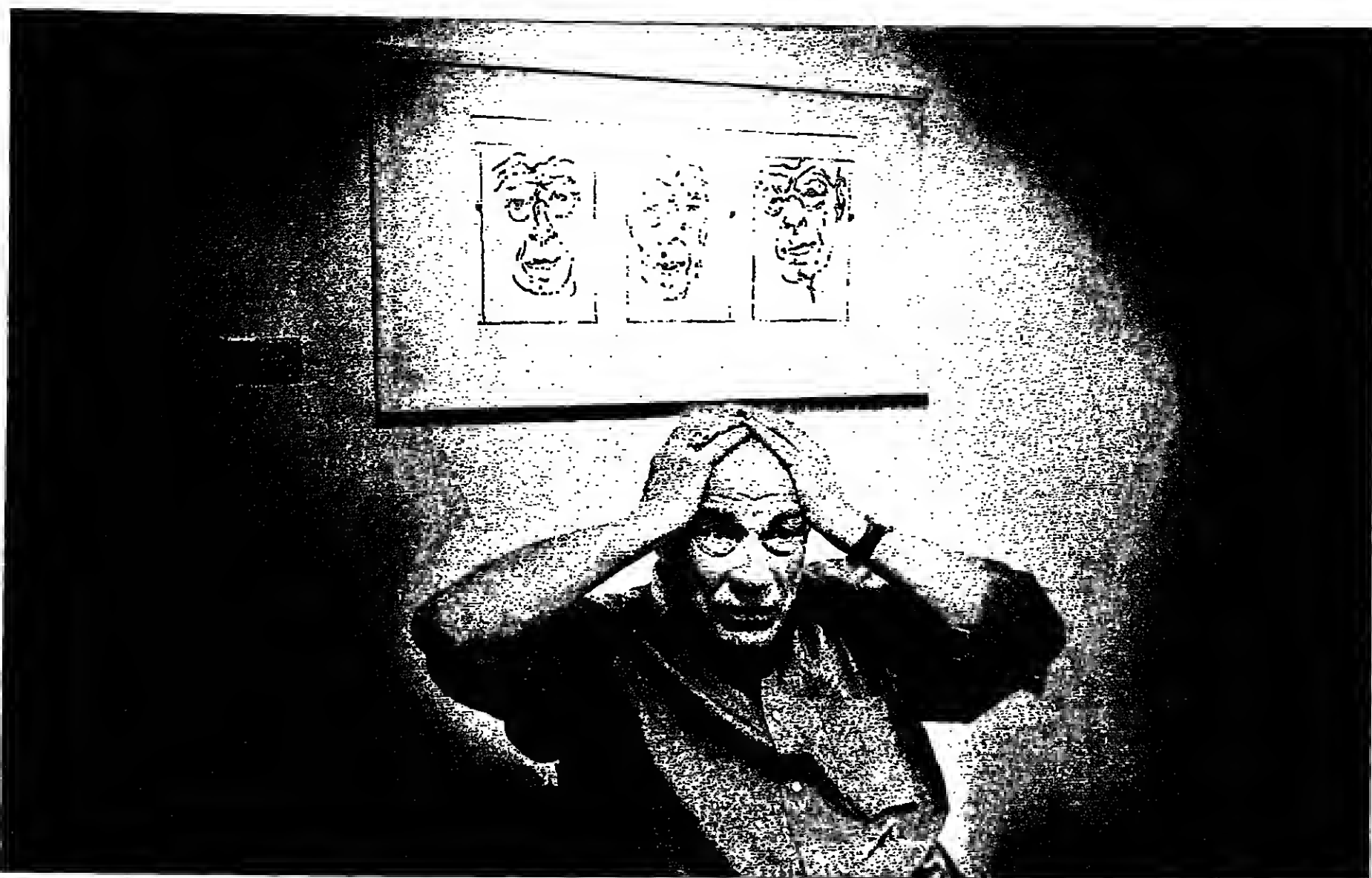
Dear Reader,

Have you been on a city break in the last 12 months? If so, then we would like to hear from you.

By filling in the questionnaire you have the chance to win a UK City Break at one of the following hotels: Five Lakes Hotel, Golf & Country Club, Maldon, Essex, are offering a two night 'Pamper time' stay in an en-suite room with English breakfast. The pampering includes massage, facial and manicure with an evening meal from the table d'hôte in the award winning Camelot restaurant. Or have a weekend break in the Minotel Herald House Hotel in a double or twin room with a full English breakfast where you can take advantage of their courtyard bar and acclaimed restaurant. The hotel is situated in the heart of Edinburgh only a few minutes walk from Princes Street. Offers are based on two people sharing and subject to availability and confirmation by the hotel. Winners to be drawn at random.

Please send your completed questionnaire to: City Break Questionnaire, Freepost 13583, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5DL, to arrive no later than 31st January 1998.

<p>1. How many city breaks holidays in the UK have you had in the last 12 months (excluding visits to family and friends)?</p> <p>None (go to Q3) 5) 0 Three 3 One 1 Four+ 4 Two 2</p>		<p>8. Regarding your choice of accommodation, how would you rate the following in order of importance, with 1 being not at all important and 5 being very important?</p> <p>Price/deal 14) 1 2 3 4 5 Picture in brochure/paper 15) 1 2 3 4 5 Type of hotel 16) 1 2 3 4 5 Location 17) 1 2 3 4 5 Facilities 18) 1 2 3 4 5 Other 19) 1 2 3 4 5</p>		<p>13. Which of the following do you use for information about what to do on your city break?</p> <p>Guide book 25) 1 Tourist information 2 Newspaper articles 3 Advice from friends 4 Television holiday programmes 5 Other - please state 8</p>																										
<p>2. And which cities in the UK did you stay in?</p> <p>London on 1 occasion 6) 1 Cardiff 7) 1 London on 2+ occasions 2 Edinburgh 2 Bath 3 Leeds 3 Birmingham 4 Oxford 4 Brighton 5 Manchester 5 Bristol 6 Stratford 6 Cambridge 7 York 7 Canterbury 8 Other - please state 7-8</p>		<p>9. What was the cost in total per person?</p> <p>£50 or under 20) 1 £251-£350 4 £51-£150 2 £351+ 5 £151-£250 3</p>		<p>14. Have you ever been on any of the following holidays within the UK in the last 12 months?</p> <p>Health farm 26) 1 Golf 3 Boating 2 Murder mystery 4 Other 3</p>																										
<p>3. How many city break holiday abroad have you had in the last 12 months (excluding visits to family and friends)?</p> <p>None (go to Q5) 8) 0 Three 3 One 1 Four+ 4 Two 2</p>		<p>10. What was the main method of transport to your last city break destination?</p> <p>Own car 21) 1 Rail 4 Hired car 2 Air 5 Ferry/hovercraft 3 Coach 6 Other - please state 8</p>		<p>15. Have you ever responded to any advertising in The Independent or Independent on Sunday regarding a holiday?</p> <p>27) Yes 1 No 2</p>																										
<p>4. Which cities abroad did you visit?</p> <p>Amsterdam 9) 1 New York 10) 1 Barcelona 2 Paris 2 Berlin 3 Prague 3 Dublin 4 Rome 4 Madrid 5 Venice 5 Other - please state 8</p>		<p>11. From the following list choose the three most important factors influencing your choice of city destination.</p> <p>Price 22) 1 Museums/places of historic interest 2 Nightclubs 3 Shopping 4 Theatres/shows 5 Restaurants/food 6 Distance from home 7 Country 8 Recommendations from friends 9 Newspaper article 23) 1 TV programme 2 An event in the city 3 Other - please state 8</p>		<p>16. Which of the following national quality newspapers do you read during the week (ie. Monday-Friday) and on a Saturday?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Mon-Fri</th> <th>Sat</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Daily Telegraph 28) 1</td> <td>29) 1</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Financial Times 2</td> <td>2</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Guardian 3</td> <td>3</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Independent 4</td> <td>4</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Times 5</td> <td>5</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Mon-Fri	Sat	Daily Telegraph 28) 1	29) 1		Financial Times 2	2		The Guardian 3	3		The Independent 4	4		The Times 5	5								
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Daily Telegraph 28) 1	29) 1																													
Financial Times 2	2																													
The Guardian 3	3																													
The Independent 4	4																													
The Times 5	5																													
<p>5. Thinking about the last city break you took, was it in the UK or abroad?</p> <p>UK 11) 1 Abroad 2</p>		<p>17. And which of the following quality Sunday newspapers do you read almost always (A/A), quite often (Q/O), only occasionally (O/O) or never?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>A/A</th> <th>Q/O</th> <th>O/O</th> <th>Never</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Independent on Sunday 30) 1</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Observer 31) 2</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sunday Telegraph 32) 3</td> <td>3</td> <td>3</td> <td>3</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sunday Times 33) 4</td> <td>4</td> <td>4</td> <td>4</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			A/A	Q/O	O/O	Never	Independent on Sunday 30) 1	1	1	1	1	Observer 31) 2	2	2	2	2	Sunday Telegraph 32) 3	3	3	3	3	Sunday Times 33) 4	4	4	4	4	<p>ABOUT YOU</p> <p>Sex 34) Male 1 Female 2</p> <p>Age 35) 15-24 1 45-54 4 25-34 2 55-64 5 35-44 3 65+ 6</p> <p>Working status</p> <p>36) Full time (30hrs+ per week) 1 Part time 2 Studying full time 3 Unemployed 4 Retired 5 Not working 6</p> <p>Do you have a degree?</p> <p>37) Yes 1 No 2</p> <p>Residential area</p> <p>London 38) 1 South/SE 5 Wales 39) 1 East Anglia 2 South West 6 Midlands 2 North West 3 North/West 7 Scotland 3 N Ireland 4 Ireland 8 Abroad 4</p>	
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Sunday Telegraph 32) 3	3	3	3	3																										
Sunday Times 33) 4	4	4	4	4																										
<p>6. How many nights did you spend away?</p> <p>1-2 12) 1 5+ 3 3-4 2</p>		<p>12. How did you book your last city break?</p> <p>Through a travel agent 24) 1 Teletext 2 Telephone direct to company 3 Through a newspaper 4 Through a magazine 5 Other - please state 8</p>		<p>THANK YOU</p> <p>Please fill in your details if you are entering the competition.</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>Postcode _____</p> <p>Evening telephone number _____</p> <p>Please tick the box if you would not be willing to help us with any research in the future. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>For your free copy of Minotel GB and Ireland Guide, plus a 10% discount voucher: Send your name and address, marking your request "The Independent" to Minotel GB Ltd, 37 Springfield Road, Blackpool, Lancs, FY1 2PZ.</p>																										
<p>7. And what type of accommodation did you stay in?</p> <p>4-5 star hotel 13) 1 Self catering 4 2-3 star hotel 2 Bed and breakfast 5 1 star hotel 3 Youth hostel 6 Other - please state 8</p>																														



Seeking the invisible: John Berger poses before 'Face Writing', a triple self-portrait. 'With images of faces,' he says, 'what one looks for is to make that face also a place' - in this case, Inch Kenneth in the Hebrides

Photograph: Rui Xavier

John Berger: ways of seeing, ways of biking

For well-nigh half a century, John Berger - poet, essayist, critic, novelist, playwright, veteran guru of the left - has taught us new ways of thinking, new ways of seeing the world. So what is he doing now? Drawing motorbikes. He tells Andrew Lambirth the reason why.

A compact, energetic figure with white hair, John Berger will be 72 this year. He was born in Stoke Newington, North London, but for 30 years he has lived abroad, and now makes his home in a village in the French Alps. He is hesitant in conversation; you feel that he is weighing every word, searching for the *mot juste*. There is the parallel sensation that he is translating from another language - French? - as he speaks. At one point he says: "freedom, but not with a capital L" (as, presumably, in *Liberte*), before quickly correcting himself. His "no" reverts to a "not" at times of emphasis.

His apparent shyness is no doubt a mask for his sensitivity - the sensitivity that permits him to respond so intricately to works of art, people and places. His seriousness is matched by a willing sense of humour. Berger has a warm presence; he is charming and courteous. Yet there is also a reserve; you sense a hidden, private core to the man, which may or may not be serene.

Today, John Berger is perhaps best known as a Booker Prize-winning writer of fiction, yet even those whose eyes were opened by his extraordinary 1972 TV series, *Ways of Seeing*, may not be aware that he began life as an artist, training first at the Central School, where he stayed for almost two years before going into the army. Demobbed in 1946, he continued his interrupted education at Chelsea School of Art. There were good teachers on the staff: Robert Medley, Geri Richards, Henry Moore, Julian Trevelyan. At that point

Berger saw himself as pursuing a life in art. He had some success in group exhibitions, then in 1953 he was given a solo show at Wildenstein's of some 15 or 20 paintings, nearly all of which are now dispersed to the winds. The Wildenstein show was his last in England until this week. He returns now to the gallery circuit with 14 recent drawings, showing at Purdy Hicks, near the new Tate at Bankside. A modest show, but full of interest, and highly typical of the man.

I am interviewing him in the gallery, and we return to the story of his development. What does he think now of the paintings of that early period? He frowns. "Several things. First of all, that they are often quite clumsy. And then, almost the opposite: that they could be freer, that they're a bit constipated. But I can also see in them, somewhere struggling behind that restrictiveness, a kind of passion, which I can recognise perhaps as mine."

It was in 1953, too, that Berger stopped practising as an artist. Not that he stopped drawing altogether, but being an artist now took second place to writing, and drawing became simply an activity he undertook from time to time. "Like a diary?" I ask. "No, it was either more functional than that, or more relational. Either I drew because I saw something and wanted to remember it for some quite definite purpose, or I would draw something which I thought would help me with my writing. Sometimes I would draw portraits of people I was inventing in a book, or portraits of intimate friends. I've always done that - it's not really a question of making a portrait but of trying to follow the traces of their lives, which are somehow visible in their hands or in their faces."

Despite, or perhaps because of, his need for precision of expression, Berger notoriously finds writing difficult, and turns to drawing almost for light relief. He makes no claims for his new exhibition, but he's always been keen to put on record the various as-

pects of his creativity - whether essays, criticism, plays, poetry, photographs or fiction. The drawings, mostly in charcoal or ink, are clearly important to him, but he remains modest about them. "About four or five years ago, I began to draw more and more. And then I realised something. For 35 or 40 years, I really wasn't drawing very much. One would suppose that, if one then went back to it, one would more or less go back to where one had stopped. But I found surprisingly that, during those mute years, things had gone on de-

'It was the height of the Cold War, we were living under threat of nuclear war... In that situation, to draw and paint seemed not urgent enough'

veloping, there had been an evolution. So I was actually further on."

So why did he give up art for literature? "The creative choices that one makes in a life are much more incoherent and compulsive than one pretends afterwards. I wasn't really because I became discouraged about myself as a painter. No. Of course I had days of despair, as everybody does, but that hadn't overburdened me. It was the height of the Cold War - 1952, '53, '54 - we were living under the imminent threat of nuclear war. It seemed that one really had to protest in order to make this terminal catastrophe even slightly less likely. In that situation, to draw and paint seemed not urgent enough. Of course, one could have made posters and agitprop, but it's not something I ever did."

"I had a certain capacity to write. I discovered that when I was a kid at school. I wrote poems, letters... It became possible

for me to become a journalist, and I could talk directly about the nuclear threat and the political choices. So it was a kind of urgent, somewhat desperate politicisation which led me to begin writing. Having done that I began to see that it was difficult to combine these two activities. Painting has to be a full-time activity. You really have to be covered with this material that you're working with, whether it's paint or clay. So I then decided that, rather than be a one-handed painter, it was better to stop."

Berger was the feared and respected art critic of *The New Statesman* for a decade (1952-62), writing in favour of social (not socialist) realism, a logical extension of his commitment to Marxism. He also wrote other journalism, but it was not long before he felt the urge to go beyond reporting the immediate, and explore fiction. His first novel, *A Painter of Our Time*, published in 1958, is primarily about painting. The book has an experimental and slightly didactic feeling to it, and is based on a group of people, many of them émigrés from Central and Eastern Europe, who lived in the Finchley Road area. Berger says that if anyone inspired the observations on painting in the book it was a Dutch artist and close friend, Friso Ten Holt, who in fact died the week before our interview. Ten Holt also had a motorbike, a BSA, and made a number of journeys by bike with Berger. This is not as irrelevant as it sounds: from an early age, Berger has been passionate about motorbikes, and still rides one. Three of the drawings in this exhibition are about the experience of biking.

It is a subject Berger is convinced he will return to. "This is really just the beginning," he says. Two drawings feature a biker traversing a printed map. I ask whether this is Berger in conceptual mode. "They're not drawings about motorbikes, they're about the experience of riding a bike. I was working on the series, fiddling around, when suddenly I had the idea of drawing on a map. Then I began to see something which is not

so much conceptual as phenomenological, to do with experience. The contours on a map, the rivers, the roads, the mountain ranges, begin to make a metaphor with the body of the motorbiker and the hike. In a strange way you become the journey that you've made, until the next one. You eat it and you spit it out: it passes through you."

We look together at other drawings in the gallery. One, *O Betanzos*, depicts a small town in Galicia, northern Spain. "It was a very poor town, from which thousands of emigrants left for Cuba and Latin America... I went there several summers; I love this place. I did several drawings, always with this obsession that Betanzos was a town which people left, so the drawing is about memory."

A triptych called *Face Writing*, done in ink on the pages of a Chinese notebook of absorbent paper, is a series of three self-portrait heads drawn with spidery economy. "With images of faces, what one looks for is to make that face also a place, a specific place," he means. In terms of where it was drawn - Inch Kenneth, in the Hebrides. And that's all the information that Berger thinks necessary to impart.

As visitors to his exhibition, our primary job is to look, not to sniff out autobiography. There are drawings of fish, made partly from Berger's interest in movement. Their particular appeal? "I suppose it is the fantastic intricacy of these creatures... There are two things about fish: their speed, which is expressed in their forms, and that their lives are incredibly secret. Except when you glimpse them through the water, or they're dead, you never see fish. And it seems to me that so much drawing and painting is finally about seeking the invisible."

'Drawings by John Berger' is at Purdy Hicks, 65 Hopton Street, London SE1 (0171-401 9229) until 31 January. 'Pages of the Wound', a limited edition of Berger's selected poems, photographs and drawings (John Christie at Circle Press, £270), is on sale at the gallery.

The wispy little man behind the big Bronx novel

Don DeLillo
Congress House

That small sense of *déjà vu* perhaps: a crowd of 500 packed into TUC headquarters to hear Don DeLillo, scion of Italian immigrants from the Bronx, talk a lot of fiction. The publishers had described it as the literary event of the decade. It cost £3.50 a head, and was on the No 7 bus route.

At the end of the evening, in exchange for a voluntary levy of approximately £15, many walked away with living proof that they had been there - a novel, *Underworld*, weighing in at approximately 2 kilos, together with a spidery signature of authenticity.

Many in that crowd were PhD students - the girl sitting next to me was 80,000 words into a doctorate on the post-modern American novel. She'd approached the subject through cybernetics at first, she said, but her supervisor at Birkbeck had suggested a slightly different approach - through noise theory. This was why she'd read DeLillo's *White Noise*. It was the only one of his books she'd read. It had been very interesting, she said.

At exactly the moment when anticipation reached fever pitch, the Waterstone's marketing manager walked on stage to tell us how to queue for the book-signing at the end, and to remind us that it might be embarrassing if the book hadn't been purchased first. Mr DeLillo was not in the habit of signing paper serviettes or merely handing out easy smiles, not these days. Then an oozy American literary editor from the *New York Observer* hit the podium running, with enough ridiculous hyperbole to make an author break down in tears of gratitude. No wonder DeLillo, when he came bounding across the stage like a kangaroo, looked contented. He even flicked the Li Ed on the back of the neck with the cutting edge of his manuscript to show that he was being really pally.

The Birkbeck PhD already knew what DeLillo would be like - small and wispy, with a heavy lisp. More private citizen than literary hero. And so it was. He treated us to 35 minutes of readings from the book, a kaleidoscope of literary images: the wonderful, fast repartee of a couple of Bronx hutchers; kids smashing up a carriage on the Elevated Railroad; taking the sun on the roof of an apartment building in the Fifties, the tar melting in the heat.

DeLillo knew that it was going to be a long book after he'd written the 20,000-word opening sequence, a description of a legendary ballgame between the Giants and the Dodgers, set in 1951. Somewhere within that sequence, a single sentence is buried describing a kid on a Bronx roof, listening to that game on the radio.

That kid, Nick Shay, would become the central character of the panoramic view of the Cold War era that the 800-page novel grew into over four years. Enough to keep any post-doctoral student of American literature gainfully employed for at least two lifetimes.

Michael Glover

THE WEEK ON RADIO ROBERT HANKS

The past is unfashionable right now: cutting ourselves off from our roots, drawing a line under things, modernising, reinventing - that's what we like doing. That old stuff, tradition and so forth, it's a bit passé now, isn't it?

Living Ideas, this week's *Postscript* series on Radio 3, was based on the positively nerdy belief that history isn't so easily got rid of; you think you've wiped it off your shoes, but the smell clings. Four contemporary thinkers argued the relevance of their predecessors to the world we live in, starting with the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who put the case for "Stoic cosmopolitanism".

Cosmopolitanism was invented by Diogenes the Cynic - a man famous for 2,000 years for living in a barrel - which wouldn't get him more than 15 seconds of air time in the *Ten O'Clock News* "And finally..." slot if he were alive today. The Stoics only popularised it. A cosmopolitan is, literally, a "citizen of the world". Cosmopolitanism held that class, rank, status, national origin and gender are

irrelevant to moral worth; we may have local ties and preferences, but we are all part of a common human community. You can see the aspiration at work in modern phenomena from the International Court at the Hague to the *Bill and Ted* films, with their powerful moral, "Be cool to one another".

But the irrelevance of class and rank remains an ideal, and possibly not even that, in a country where placating the rich has become one of the first principles of government. Machiavelli's practical political thought, the subject of Quentin Skinner's slot on Wednesday, seems to have had more concrete influence. The good ruler, quoted Skinner, knows how to vary his conduct with the winds of fortune, and knows that appearance is everything. Is there some modern politician Skinner could have had in mind? Come to that, are there any Skinner could not have had in mind?

The power of history to shape the present was given its full due in *Empire* (Radio 4, Monday), where Peter Jay took Gibbon's *Decline and*

Fall of the Roman Empire as the model for a four-part obituary of the British Empire. The first programme was dragged down by a clichéd production - an imperial march by William Walton, clapping hooves, cheering crowds - and by Jay's over-assured delivery. But underneath lay an appealing intellectual shyness, an unwillingness to put forward explanations and motives for such a loose, heterogeneous phenomenon, as Jay moved towards the reflection that what can happen, will happen.

Fortunately, that isn't true, as evidenced by Kennedy's *Secret Tapes* (Radio 4, Wednesday), an account of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Anthony Howard, all breathless intelligence, narrated and Ed Bishop made a strangely sheepish JFK. What could have happened here was a nuclear strike on Cuba - in fact, the programme suggested, it came closer to happening than people realised at the time. Listening, you felt a trickle of uneasy relief that it didn't, and realised that this is what really matters about history: it's still going on.

A WEEK IN THE ARTS DAVID LISTER

Theatre just isn't "relevant", intones Dominic, the pompous young TV producer in David Hare's outstanding play *Any Old*, which transferred to the West End this week. He is suitably chided - with Hare's approval, one suspects. But in the Royal Shakespeare Company's new season brochure also out this week, I spy the "make it relevant" factor at work once more.

Take this breathless description of a play. The hero, we read, "is the only one who knows who has killed his father. When he alerts the murderer to the fact, he puts his own life in danger." That's *Hamlet*. OK, that was easy. What about "It is his conscience that troubles the king... or another lady?" If you plumped for *Henry VIII*, proceed to the final round. "A complex web of sexual passion, political hope and private despair." Gotcha! Anyone who correctly guessed *Uncle Vanya* can proceed straight to an executive job in the RSC marketing department.

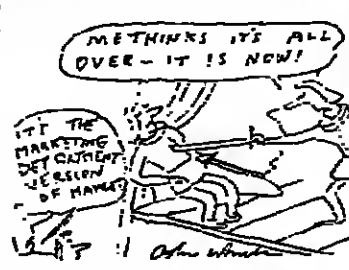
On one level, I'm in favour of any wheeze that encourages

more people to see Adrian Noble's latest London season; on another, I smell the "Dominic tendency" here: make it all sound "relevant". And it's a bit of a con trick, ultimately of doubtful benefit.

Hamlet, despite the protestations of innumerable directors chasing the young person's vote, is not a thriller. It is a richly layered, complex, poignant, poetic

drama, with insights that transcend its age. It is best appreciated with some advance study of the text and its language, but the rewards are lifelong. No marketing person is going to write any of that, of course. But aren't psychological insights, poetry and unrequited love as "relevant" as the cinematic sound-bites of "alerting the murderer" and "putting his own life in danger"?

Of course, it's all a way of trying to get a new audience into the theatre. The problem with trying to persuade them that they are about to see *LA Confidential* on stage is that they might just leave at the interval.



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THE INDEPENDENT INDEPENDENT
ART 98

Professionalism and imagination: the only response to falling arts subsidies



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Among the works associated with Sir Isaiah Berlin – fondly remembered at a memorial service this week – is his enrichment of the old adage that there is no accounting for taste. Values, he taught, are incommensurable, and the old liberal idea that we should work towards a nirvana where all conflicts can be ended is not only inhuman but positively dangerous.

Well, scanning the latest Arts Council budget allocations, it's hard not to agree. Here is a miniature example of the wider point. How exactly do we measure the relative worthiness of supporting – out of a limited and shrinking total of public money – opera rather than film, poetry against painting, and after that decide, say, that this big London-based company is more deserving than that provincial troupe or even (a critical example) this London orchestra rather than that?

The answer is we cannot. Decisions have to be made, and money allocated. But there will always be argument, endless dispute about what constitutes innovation, about what is good and worthy and what deserves subsidy from the taxpayers when patrons won't pay up. That debate is not just inevitable. It is thoroughly healthy. The core principle, that there should be public subsidy, is unassailable. The vexing questions are how much and for whom. What

is essential is that such judgements are made openly, and that they are available to be defended by those who make them on the public's behalf. The public's assent has to be earned rather than taken for granted. Too often arts administrators have allowed their defensiveness to become an excuse for closet decision-making, too readily (but understandably) interpreted by the public as arrogance.

That is the biggest criticism that can be levelled at the Arts Council. Born as a buffer, to stop direct political interference in artistic projects, the Council has too often itself become a sealed container, its deliberations impervious to public gaze and correction. Worse, it has not even been well run. Too often the paying public has been left with the impression of an institution afraid of debate, and inefficient with it. Too often under Arts Council oversight, arts administration has remained the province of amateurs, sincere, titled, well-intentioned... and innumerate. That is a generalisation unfair to many organisations, no doubt – but all too apt a description of, for example, the Royal Opera.

In this light, the twin appointments this week of new chairmen for both the Arts Council and the Royal Opera must be welcome news. Messrs Southgate, at Covent Garden, and Robinson, at the Arts Coun-



cil, bring two much-needed qualities to their respective tasks. Too much can be made of business acumen in the public sector – Mrs Thatcher's serial appointments proved that success in running a company or impressing the Stock Exchange is not a sufficient condition for political and administrative achievement. But managing

Granada or EMI is a very big task; it is hard to imagine Sir Colin Southgate allowing the Opera House's finances to come to their present sorry pass, if only because he would have been scrutinising the balance sheets.

What both men also offer is a fresh eye. Sir Colin takes over in anticipation of Sir Richard Eyre's report on the future of the Covent Garden site: he will need to be tough-minded and iconoclastic if company and theatre are to be re-founded. Gerry Robinson does not have to be a ruthless tycoon to ask whether the Arts Council is strictly necessary – but he will be free from the ludicrous prejudice which sees artistic endeavour as so fragile, so precious that only amateurs can be entrusted with the business of allocating grants. Both men ought to agitate for more money from all sources, that is part of the job. But both are surely realistic enough to know that – however rosy the macro-economic assumptions for the spending era after April 1999 – financial constraints are more likely to tighten than become more lax.

Besides, a lot of ritual huffing and puffing goes on over arts funding. It will always be a critical, and unending, dialogue between "elitists" and "egalitarians", between those who want to concentrate the limited sums on the identifiably excellent

companies and sites so they can build and prosper and those who want to see a thousand flowers blooming, especially in the provinces, even at the expense of quality.

A critical chairman of the Arts Council ought to get himself along to the Aldwych Theatre and pick up the question posed (but disappointingly not answered) in David Hare's new play *Amy's View*: why should (subsidised) theatre be languishing when movie and television drama flourishes? Given his background, Gerry Robinson might extend the question-naire and ask about orchestral subsidy levels, given the trends in the market for recorded classical music.

There are hard questions, but there are no clear or absolute answers: a touch toward elitism or towards populism might look intellectually clever but would be disastrous in practice. If the Arts Council is to exist at all – and we are sceptics on that – then it should prove itself by finding more imaginative ways of using public money. It should support individual makers of music, art and drama – poets and sculptors – not simply institutions. It should ensure that we are provoked as well as charmed. And above all, it should be rigorous and ruthlessly professional in its management of money. That may not be an art; but without it, art suffers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Welfare reform

Sir: I was concerned to read Tony Benn's defence of the current system of maternity benefits (letter, 13 January).

Maternity payments no longer benefit those most in need. In fact, they redistribute resources away from the poorest in society, because the more you earn, the more you get. For example, a woman earning £50,000 a year will receive maternity payments of almost £6,000, while another earning £60 per week gets nothing, because she is below the lower earnings limit.

Although £500m is spent on this benefit, one in five women workers who get pregnant get nothing.

Labour established the welfare state in 1945 – a different time, and in many ways a different world. Breadwinners were usually men, with women playing a role outside the workplace. Since the 40s, there has been an explosion of women working, particularly part-time. The social security system, and maternity benefits in particular, has not changed to reflect this.

A reforming government that wants to rejuvenate the welfare state must modernise it, and that means ensuring that redistribution is towards, and not away from, those poorest women who currently face exclusion. LORNA FITZSIMONS MP (Rochdale, Lab) Chair, Parliamentary Labour Party Women's Group House of Commons London SW1

Sir: The debate about delivery of universal benefits to the affluent raises a question. Will a government which has the courage to seek an integrated transport policy also have the stamina to address that other holy grail, the amalgamation of the tax and benefits systems?

A system whereby individuals hold a lifelong account with the state into which they pay when they are able and from which they draw as they need would obviate the distortions of the current parallel systems and offer a more subtle set of policy levers than is currently available.

For example, an individual's account might be debited for routine health services such as dental or eye care, but not for the potentially bankrupting treatment of acute or chronic illness. A variety of means might be available to credit an individual's account. A graduate seeking employment could gain credit against her student loan by undertaking voluntary work, whilst a middle-aged person might gain credit against her own pension by caring for an elderly relative and thereby saving the state a substantial sum.

A new mechanism for the financial relationship between individuals and the state is a prerequisite for a stakeholder society. JIM TOOTHILL London SW4



Injustice: the sword of the disgraced Captain Alfred Dreyfus is ceremonially broken in the yard of the Ecole Militaire, January 1895

Hulton Getty

Esterhazy's fate

Sir: Esterhazy, for whose spying Dreyfus was blamed ("France still haunted by the spectre of

Dreyfus", 13 January), dealt with the German military attaché in Paris, Colonel von Schwarzkoppen, who took orders directly from the military

authorities in Berlin. The German ambassador, Count Münster von Dornberg, hated espionage, and was unaware of what was taking place. After he

fled France in September 1898, Esterhazy lived in England under various pseudonyms for most of the remainder of his life. He is buried in St Nicholas's

churchyard at Harpenden, Hertfordshire, under the name Count Jean de Vollemont. TIMOTHY ROBEY Southport, Merseyside

Bike victim

Sir: Daniel Johnson (letter 16 January) seems to wish to justify cyclists riding on the pavement by pointing out that during a given period there were many more collisions between cars and pedestrians. He does not tell us whether the cars were driving on the pavement. He does, however, say that the statistics are unreliable when referring specifically to cyclists on pavements because "they do not indicate where the collision took place or which party was at fault".

NEVILLE CONDER London SW7

Sir: Setting up battle lines between cyclists and pedestrians

is not helpful. They both share the same means of propulsion, their legs, share the same concerns not to be hit by motor vehicles and as studies show (Transport Research Laboratories – Project Report 15) are well able to share the same environment with consideration and co-operation. New cyclists and children in particular are going to need all the help and encouragement they can get if we are going to have any chance to stem the car culture and reap the manifold benefits which this efficient, low impact machine has to offer.

The answer is not in more bureaucracy with fixed penalties at some places and complicated procedures to redesignate footpaths for dual use of pedestrians and cyclists in others. The part of the ancient Highways Act prohibiting cyclists from footways should be repealed and the time and effort go into promoting good practice and considerate behaviour. Sections 28 and 29 of the Road Traffic Act on dangerous riding and due care and attention cover this. Fixed penalties, administered with discretion, for cases of bad behaviour under this Act may well be appropriate. PETER HAYMAN Glasgow

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Asthma in Cuba

Sir: Mrs J Mathews suggests that the rise in asthma may be connected with multi-vaccination at an early age (letter, 14 January).

Two years ago I went to Cuba on holiday. While I was on a group visit to a collective farm the resident nurse was asked about the main medical problems encountered locally. She said that one of their main concerns was the steady increase in childhood asthma. On further questioning it was apparent that the asthma trends in Cuba over the last few decades have been broadly similar to those in the UK.

One would think that the environments were quite different; especially that Cuba has very little road traffic pollution, because it has very little road traffic. Climate and diet are different. One thing that Cuba does have in common with the UK is a comprehensive public health service, including mass childhood vaccination.

I would be tempted to jump to the conclusion that Mrs Mathews has hit the nail on the head, but Tony Bosworth of Friends of the Earth points out on the same page that some kinds of air pollution are felt a long way

from their source. So asthma in Cuba and the UK might both be caused by global pollution of some kind. However, the coincidence of the vaccination programmes deserves close study. KEN HAGGETT Sheffield

Unfilled jobs

Sir: There seemed to be two strands of thought in your article (14 January) on recruitment difficulties in the food industry: the unwillingness of talented young people to enter and the paucity of qualified and experienced managers.

I have noticed unwillingness among my children's peers to enter any industrial or manufacturing business. Their view is that potential employers offer no security in the long term in return for lower remuneration during training and, as a result, they are better advised to make their talents into high-paid/high-risk jobs in IT and finance.

Until manufacturing companies convince talented young people that they are reliable partners, why should entrants into the job market prefer them to consultancy firms offering more immediate cash and no less secure futures?

The shortage of experienced and qualified managers is a myth. The largest group of people in the UK is the post-war bulge group. These are between 45 and 50. How many vacancies do the appointments

columns carry that reflect this reality? An older manager looking for a job is often rejected as "overqualified" when he is eminently suitable except that he is applying for a post similar to one that he did successfully 15-20 years ago. A C WATSON Woking Surrey

Fast answers

Sir: Our Dad read the article on encyclopaedias and computer CD-Roms (13 January), and then set us the three questions that the two researchers were given. We achieved all the questions in less than three minutes. We think most children between six and 12 who have a PC at home could do as well or better. We think your researchers must have been either very young (under four) or very old (over 16). MICHAEL KINSELLA (aged seven) JAMES KINSELLA (aged 10) Glasgow

Pigs in clover

Sir: Regarding the two escaped pigs, I am sure that Lord Emsworth would be delighted to give them a comfortable home in the wonderful surroundings of Blandings Castle and, no doubt, his brother Galahad would be able to devise suitable compensation for their owner. PHILIP R EVANS Hengrave, Suffolk

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Well, I am clearly a dullard editor. For why? Because my brilliant wheeze of the week comes just too late. There has been a frantic bidding war for the Tamworth porkers. The Express wanted to buy them for £1,000 but was outbid by rivals, and the price has reportedly now hit five figures. The nation has momentarily, put down its cutlery to shed a fat and sentimental tear over the runaway pigs. Our resident hard, Martin Newall, produced a very fine ballad on the subject earlier in the week. Now, though, the Plain People of Britain wish – no, they absolutely demand – that there be a happy ending to the story, with Butch and Sundance given luxurious quarters and a handsome income before enjoying a happy retirement. Only then will the PPB settle down, relaxed, to enjoy a packet of pork scratchings and a bacon sandwich.

Here, surely, was a great opportunity for a ruthlessly amoral editor (Marr, A) to make a buck. We should have outbid everyone, splashing out £50,000 or £100,000, for the pigs. Then we could have announced that they were going to be turned into bacon butties and sold to our readers... unless a kinder-hearted rival bought them back from us first. Given the sentimental weakness of the tabloid press, I could have made a packet, certainly tripling the investment, and earning enough to buy in a couple of dippy twenty-something columnists, a Paul Johnson essay on moral turpitude, and open a bureau in Brazil. Dammit. Why didn't I think of that earlier?

When I was nobbut a boy in Perthshire, I devoured the first glossy *Sunday Times* magazines partly because they published, week after week, illustrations from exhibitions that I'd never get to see. Then, for some reason, the fashion for visual art in weekend magazines passed.

In today's *Independent Saturday Magazine*, however, you will find pages devoted to paintings from Manchester, Liverpool, Swindon, Plymouth, Cookham and other non-London galleries. Next week the paintings go on show at the Royal Academy, where a ticket to "The Art Treasures of England; the Regional Collections" will cost you £7. Most of the time, though, you can see these and many other treasures free at local galleries.

Why the campaigning note? Because this will be the year when the principle of free access to public galleries and museums survives or dies. A holding operation has kept the British Museum free for now but its finances are precarious and there are those in the Treasury asking why the taxpayer should help. Many of the galleries whose finest jewels are in the new exhibition are in a parlous state too. Closing them off to casual visitors would be as had an act of civic vandalism as shutting urban parks.

Though the phrase "Victorian values" came to be associated with Margaret Thatcher, there's more than a whiff of Victorianism about New Labour too. There's Gladstone as Blair's preferred role model. There's the belief in work and self-reliance preached from Downing Street, and even the more traditionalist morality of those middle-class converts whom the American sociologist Charles Murray defined a few years ago as "new Victorians". But of course most of the struggling regional galleries were also Victorian creations and remind us of another side to that era; the generous-minded and open attitude to the arts as an essential aspect of education. These are mind-altering substances which this newspaper firmly believes should be freely available on demand... and yes, even to children.

Andrew Marr

QUOTE UNQUOTE

Alas, in a culture that encourages feeble-minded political correctness, great monuments and great works of art are not to be expected – Stephen Bayley, who resigned as creative director of the Millennium Dome, protesting about the involvement of focus groups in its creation

Robin Cook is obviously dangerous around airports. First he ditched his wife, now he's declaring undying love. His advisers should make sure he only travels by road or rail – Linda McDougall, author of the book *Westminster Women*

We need to make reading more sexy. The literati is dominated by those who graduated from Oxbridge in states of advanced condescension – Kathy Lette, bestselling author

Anyone who watched the game or has seen a video will recognise it would have taken the act of a contortionist with stiletto studs for a boot to have caused Simon's injury – Richard Yerbury, London Scottish chief executive on claims the ear injury was not caused by a bite

I've done something with my life. I've made kids happy around the world – Walter Diemer, inventor of bubble gum, before he died this week

Celebrity is as addictive and destructive as any drink and I am a recovering celebrity – Barry Manilow

subsidies

If only I were a hard-working, hard-drinking Jewish agnostic



DAVID
AARONOVITCH
UNEXPLAINED
CORRELATIONS

A sex survey published in the United States this week sheds important light on the welfare debate currently raging in this country. With the swapping of statistics on benefit fraud, the amount of abuse of disability payments and the existence or otherwise of a dependency culture, the all-important question is raised yet again about whether we are seeing causation or simply correlation. This week, fortuitously, assistance in the interpreting of such figures has come from Penn State University, under whose aegis a major study of sexual activity involving 10,000 Americans has just been completed. And the results of this very large survey have sent academics and sociologists into a frenzy of evaluation, as they compete to explain the results.

The first important figure tells us that there is less of this sex stuff going on than we thought. (Although a warning here: as far as I can tell onanism is not counted as sexual activity by the Penn State researchers.) Twenty per cent of respondents had not "had" sex in the previous year, while 5 per cent did it at least three times a week. Overall this led to a statistic revealing that, while 15 per cent of the people had 50 per cent of the sex, the remaining 85 per cent had to share the rest between them – the sort of figure one associates with grossly unequal and unfair societies.

So, if you are an American who is not having a lot of sex, someone somewhere is getting your share. One day, an observer might speculate, the sexually dispossessed will rise up and occupy the boudoirs of the over-privileged. The Peter Stringfellow of Muncie and Boise will be found, suspended from the lamp-posts by their...

But hold on to that rope, for there is much more interesting material to come. A series of figures breaks down the types of people and groups within society who are most and least likely to have more than their fair ration of sex. And there are some surprises here. Those who work long hours report hav-

ing sex more often, as do those who watch the largest amount of television. At a rate of 111 times per year, married couples under 29 do it more than singles of the same age (72), or older married couples (figure not given, but I suspect around the six mark).

Those with doctorates manage less houghmagandy than those with first degrees only, jazz enthusiasts more than rock music lovers. Catholics a weeny bit more than Protestants but 20 per cent less than agnostics or Jews. Smokers do it 10 per cent more than the average, drinkers 20 per cent more, and those who both drink and smoke claim to have twice as much. In a final twist, everyone claims to have more sex during periods when confidence in the presidency is generally low.

Now, we are entitled to ask some questions about these results. It may well be, for instance, that drinkers simply think they've had more sex than they actually have, or that heavy smokers are forced – by their shortness of breath – to count things as being sex which the rest of us don't. Baths and suchlike.

But once we have dealt with any obvious anomalies, we must move on to explanations. And this is where we are forced to consider the difference between correlation and cause. Is it the fact of one's occupation or religion or musical preferences that determines one's sexual behaviour? Or is there just a correlation, which is actually caused by the general characteristics that led to some of these choices in the first place?

The significance of this question cannot be overstated. Theoretically, the person most likely to have the most sex is a twenty-something, married, Republican Jew with religious doubts, who works long hours, failed his or her doctorate and sits in front of the TV watching the Jazz station all evening, chain-smoking and boozing.

Now suppose that you are a teenage American who wishes, during his or her lifetime, to experience the optimum level of carnality. Were you to believe that these statistics indicated clear causal (as opposed to correlative) relationships, you would now begin to take action. If you were a gay you would go through the process of conversion to Judaism as soon as was practicable. And once converted, you would stand outside the synagogue on Saturday muttering, "I'm just not sure, Lord!" You would take up smoking at once, and force yourself to drink copious amounts of alcohol until you were fully acclimatised.

As soon as you came home from work or studies – which would be very late – you would flop down in front of the box, taking this opportunity to catch up on the cigarettes and drinks denied you during the day. In the car you would, at all times, play contemporary jazz tapes while complaining loudly about how Bill Clinton is sending the country to hell in a handcart.

When we scrutinise such an itinerary, it does not seem – on the face of it – to be one that holds out the promise of many long nights of writhing physical pleasure. Far from it. Personally, I would not want to sleep with such a person.

So I'd draw one of two very different conclusions from the above scenario. The first is that two surveys have become mixed up and misattributed in the Penn State computer – one on the amount of sexual activity undertaken, and the other on the incidence of early death from heart failure.

The other conclusion is that what we have here is merely a set of random correlations, and that we still have no idea what it all means. Which brings us back, I'm sure you will agree, to the Welfare debate.

The best vacations are not an escape, but a liberation



BOYD
TONKIN
HOLIDAYS OF
THE MIND

Why travel? This week we have published articles for and against the virtue of visiting foreign places. Our concluding contribution argues that it is not where, but how, you travel that really matters.

Back at the start of this decade, when Vincent Van Gogh held his centenary bash, I did my culture-vulture duty and booked timed, dated tickets to the two big shows in Holland. Vincent's graphic works, which I love almost more than those those over-exposed paintings, were installed at a museum deep in woodland near the German border. And very wonderful they proved to be – yet, oddly, not quite so memorable as the free white bicycles. In a nostalgic nod to the Amsterdam hippies of the Sixties, the surrounding country park offers visitors a fleet of unlocked bikes that you can ride for as long and as far as you want.

I can renew my passion for Vincent's engraved boots or blossoms at any time by opening a book. But I'm still looking for another A-list exhibition with a head-clearing spin attached.

The best travel consists of what Labour's own sultans of spin call "going off-message". It involves moments when you discover that, much as you like traipsing round galleries, you can enjoy a wobbly turn through the forest just as much (or vice versa). It means, in effect, having the familiar from yourself – from the bonds of habit and ego that tether people to their roles at home and work.

The paradox is that you can never plan or purchase these bursts of liberation. The actual who, expensively kitted out, becomes a snowboard hero on the Colorado slopes is just buying into someone else's pricey message. That soul-scrubbing mission to the ashram, or to find your inner child in therapy on

a Greek island, will also miss the mark. Unbidden glimpses of another you have precious little to do with cash spent, distance travelled or gurus consulted. The light of revelation can descend in Bogor or Bangkok alike.

Travel firms, of course, try to exploit our frets about the yoke of ego in some pretty crass ways. At its crudest, the new-laddish (and new-lassish) appeal to a fortnight of bed-hopping, with plastered nights under the stars and hungover days haking on the sand, simply sells a mirror-image of nine-to-five drudgery. Turning your safe bourgeois routine upside down for a bit before slinking back to the grind will always disappoint, because you can't (as it were) keep it up for ever. Quick-fix hedonism briefly swaps one off-the-peg lifestyle for another. Its bid for short-term freedom stems from the belief that, elsewhere, we will always be in chains.

Hence the familiar despair of the post-vacation Monday back at work. It's not so much that many people want to hinge in a bar or fry on a beach for 365 days every year as that they fear being slotted back into the usual pigeonholes. So, instead of seeking orgy or oblivion as a reward for 50 weeks of numbed conformity, we could use holidays to experiment with ways of being that may last much longer than the duty-free vodka.

Away from home, people feel willing to test-drive alternative versions of themselves. This pilot self is the one that dives down that unmarked alleyway, slips into that intriguing café and greets the stranger at your table – the self that risks a bit of surprise and spontaneity. But, if we really wished, we could manage that in the high street as well as the High Andes. "Travel: Bad" claimed John Rentoul on this page on Monday. "Travel: Good" riposted Simon Calder the next day. I would argue that mere bodily movement means nothing at all, but that displacement can trigger the changes that we seek.

If you do want to revamp your sense of identity, how to travel matters more than where. It may even be that intrepid treks in far-flung locations rule out that kind of mental gear-change. Scaling glaciers or dodging crocodiles calls for too much of a vigilant ego to allow for the creative drift that opens new doors in the mind. For that, you need a sense of physical security and a willingness to follow your nose, not your route-map.

I feel freest in busy, fairly prosperous places that don't much care whether I'm around or not. "Escape" to that palm-fringed tropical atoll or that quaint rainforest pueblo, and you not only have to act the part of Mr or Ms Rich Won't-Get-Stung Westerner, forever on the

look-out for con-artists or creepy-crawlies. You must also take a starring role in a hundred mortifying little sideshows that dramatise the gulf between the rich and poor worlds. Those ghastly fortress-style resorts in the Caribbean, where the only locals you meet are serving cocktails, merely add insult to injury. If you're happy to carry the misdeeds of the World Bank and the IMF in your suitcase, fine; if not, you may reach a deeper detachment from the cares of home in Berlin than in Bogota.

Two kinds of voyage illustrate the sort of self-extension that even quite humdrum holidays can bring. First is the pilgrimage, once a staple trip for European travellers and still – as the *hajj* to Mecca – a central pillar of Islam. As any Chaucer-reader knows, Western pilgrims set out for a range of reasons that stretched from the sacred to the sordid – but they all knew that the journey happened as much in the mind as on the ground. Recently, the great pilgrim's path to Santiago de Compostela has come back into vogue. Meanwhile, wholly secular opportunities for small

groups to enjoy a spell of change or reflection come dressed up as study trips in search of Pyrenean flora. Cycladic temples or Bulgarian icons.

As for the other sort of inner-directed voyage, you really can try this at home. In France during the 1920s, the Surrealist artists and writers pioneered a form of aimless urban strolling as a boost to their creative inspiration. Wandering around Paris, they hoped that random meetings and sudden insights would open up for them the strange poetry of daily life. Louis Aragon's haunting book *Paris Peasant* recounts the kind of weird and wonderful encounters that can result from a decision to treat anywhere – and especially your own backyard – as the most exotic spot on earth.

The Surrealists found beauty and mystery in the drabest city street. In contrast, over-earnest, ego-laden voyagers can experience beautiful and mysterious sites as a cliché or a chore. So drop that guidebook, jump on a hike and remember that much of travel – like much of sex – takes place purely in the head.



Canterbury pilgrims: the best travel is always a sort of pilgrimage

Bridgeman Art Library

FROM
EDITOR

The New Toryism as preached by Michael Portillo



TREVOR
PHILLIPS
LANGUAGE
AND POLITICS

You wonder why the Tories bother. In the very week that they come forward with the revolutionary proposal that their candidate for the Mayor of London be selected by a vote of all party members in the capital, Peter Stringfellow, the famous nightclub owner, announces his candidature. Offered the choice between 24-hour lap dancing and, say, living in a Jeffrey Archer novel, what do you think the capital's citizens will choose? No contest. Get your flares out: clubbing may be compulsory in Stringfellow's London.

Still, the decision to offer the party's members a say in this and

other big decisions – not least electing the leader – must be causing some furrowed brows down at the Carlton Club, which has carried the torch for Tory traditionalists for centuries. William Hague, when not home-mooning or boozing on down in Notting Hill, has had little to say about policy; having nailed the issue of Europe down, he is busy reconstructing the Tory house. He is evidently following the sound advice of those Tories who pleaded for a period of silence after the election. No one really wants to hear much from a party that is unlikely to be able to affect the price of cheese this side of the millennium.

But specific policies are not all. What a party feels like is at certain stages far more important. Organisation matters; but the stuff you pour into the bottle – the party's culture – is what voters respond to. New Labour's leaders' choice of language – tough, conservative – should have warned us all that they would not behave like Labour governments of the 1970s, ready to blow with the wind of popular sentiment. Indeed, as some of my friends in the arts world discovered this week, this Government positively delights in demonstrating its robustness in the face of old-style appeals not to abandon the needs of a

civilised society. "Civilisation", Treasury ministers seem to be saying, "is what you can pay for: now, stop whinging." The Tories have to find their "feel" too.

The letter from the Tory grandees to this newspaper, quarrelling with Mr Hague's suppression of debate on Europe, was the wrong feel. It made them look like men locked in a war that the rest of the world had forgotten. It is true that Europe divided the Con-

Remember, in the 1960s it was the Tories who were the fun party, they could be so again.

servative Party, and that perception played a part in their defeat. However, it was not simply the fact of the division, but that it was over an issue that most of the British public feel is done and dusted. Sooner or later we will join: that's the fact of our life in the global economy, and the timing and detail is for our politicians to work out. The argument is over.

For some Tories, though, this was the assembly of the great One-Nation tradition, repre-

sented most eye-catchingly by the signature of Chris Patten. He is still a brooding presence on the Christian Democratic wing of the party, said to be just waiting for Hague to stumble. But his involvement here, plus his improbable interest in running London, are signs of an uneasy spirit, worried about being forgotten, yet unsure about how to find his way back to the limelight. He does not represent the future of the Tories; but if not him, then who?

Thus far, there is no flavour of New Toryism emerging from Hague's own kitchen. But there is a tantalising odour of something exotic wafting our way from Enfield. Mr Michael Portillo has been back to the larder and has been rummaging around to see what ingredients he can offer to entice the missing millions. In his speech this week, he brought out the old staple, opposition to any progress towards European integration; but he wrapped it in some new

phrases, dealing with Britain's place in a global economy.

Where Labour may begin to seem grimly defensive on the international stage, Portillo is beginning to paint a picture of the UK as a centre of global trading, open to all, and able to span the world unencumbered by any regional attachments. On welfare, he astounded many by his speech at the last party conference, appealing for Tories to be understanding and humane; welfare mothers could be safer in his world. Even the Portillo groupies, such as the journalist Simon Heffer, are being driven to wonder aloud if they are truly hearing these words from the master's voice.

But Portillo has never been a simple proposition. He is not a pantomime Tory villain – far from it. His age, his intellect all separate him from the old Tory right. Now, freed from the factions that kept his party rivet, he is able to imagine a new culture for his party.

The Tory party, so long yoked to the old Powellite obsession with English values, could become as internationalist as it was in the nineteenth century (in its imperialist mode); it could be the champion of relaxed libertarian values against a government that too often gives off a whiff of puritan self-righteousness; it could be the party that stands up

for the rights of the individual in the face of Labour's tendency towards grim corporatism. Remember, in the 1960s, it was the Tories who were the fun party; they could be so again. In their final years of government, they may have appeared to be enjoying themselves a little too much at the expense of others; but the nation, as we approach the millennium, is ready to hang loose and have a good time – and laughing along is a luxury oppositions have that governments don't always enjoy.

I know that some of you felt I myself should have been more relaxed about the John Motson affair. However, the BBC has sent me the text of a full apology for the incident issued by Moty. It is indeed full and unreserved. However, in mitigation, he points out that he does not only have problems with blacks; he now finds it difficult to identify the Italian player Gianfranco Zola because of his new haircut. Personally, I'm prepared to leave the whole affair at a yellow card; but for the commentator's sake, I just hope that Mr Zola's barber is not offended; after all he might just be from Sicily, and the traditional Sicilian response to personal slights leaves the average Vinnie Jones tackle looking like a love bite.

It took invaders six months to destroy Hampi. But it will live in the memory forever.



400 years ago Hampi was considered the greatest of all mediaeval Hindu capitals with markets that overflowed with silks, diamonds, rubies and emeralds. In 1365 it was systematically razed to the ground by invading forces.

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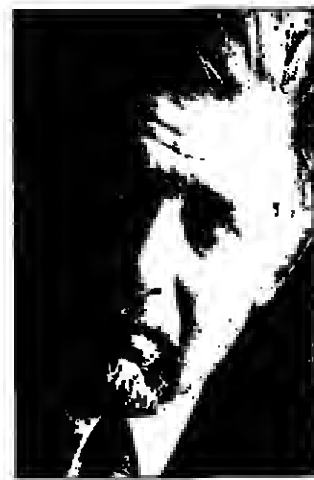
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Pastor Georgi Vins



Photograph: Keston College

Georgi Petrovich Vins, pastor born Blagoveshchensk, Siberia 4 August 1928, married (one son, three daughters); died Elkhardt, Indiana 11 January 1998.

Georgi Vins hit the world's headlines twice – when he was sentenced in 1975 for his work as a leader of the Baptist churches that resisted Soviet government controls and again in April 1979 when he was dramatically expelled from the Soviet Union with four other dissidents in exchange for two spies convicted in the United States.

The events surrounding his expulsion were bizarre. On 26 April 1979 he was woken up in prison and told to change into his own clothes. Completely unaware of his imminent change of circumstances, he was flown to Moscow for what would be his last night on Soviet soil, which he spent on bare boards in a centre for vagrants. The following day he was issued with new clothes and informed by an official who refused to give his name that because of his anti-Soviet activity the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet had stripped him of his Soviet citizenship. He was being expelled.

Vins protested in vain that his activity was not anti-Soviet, but had to bow to the inevitable.

He was told to write down the names of his close relatives so that they could leave the country with him and, realising that he would be unlikely to see them again otherwise, listed his wife, children, mother and niece. He was driven to Lefortovo prison and then all five expellees were taken to Moscow airport. Two American embassy officials on the plane explained that their release followed an agreement between the White House and the Soviet embassy in Washington. It was not until the plane landed in New York that they learnt they were being exchanged for two convicted spies, and the handover took place in an isolated hangar at Kennedy airport. The five walked off the plane at one end while the spies walked on at the other.

Once in the United States, Vins (and six weeks later the rest of his family) gradually settled down to the very different life of an exile, making the town of Elkhardt in Indiana his home and slowly learning English. He received invitations to the White House and to innumerable events around the world. At first there was hot competition between missions supporting persecuted churches in the Soviet Union to enlist him, but Vins kept his distance. He eventually set up the international representation of the Baptist churches in the Soviet Union that owed their allegiance to the Council of Churches, a group of tight-knit congregations that categorically rejected any compromises with the Soviet authorities and refused to register officially. Their members were suffering fierce persecution, with hundreds in labour camps or psychiatric hospitals.

Vins was born in the Russian Far East in 1928 to Peter Vins, an American citizen of Russian origin who had travelled to Siberia just two years before as a missionary. His father was arrested in 1930, freed three years later but soon rearrested. The family was later informed he had died. The

young Georgi was brought up by his mother, Lydia.

After the Second World War the two of them moved to Kiev and Georgi qualified as an engineer. He also became involved in the Baptist Church there. It was as Khrushchev's anti-religious persecutions began in 1959 that the state tried to impose new regulations on the Baptist Church that drastically curtailed the small measure of independence they enjoyed. As the Baptist movement split acrimoniously, Vins became one of the leading figures in the campaign to resist state pressure. He publicly opposed the pastor of his own congregation in Kiev who had accepted the new measures. Vins formed his own breakaway congregation, becoming its pastor despite his lack of theological qualifications. The group had to meet in a forest outside Kiev.

When the Council of Churches was formally set up as an underground body in 1965, Vins became its general secretary. Hundreds of the movement's followers were already in prison. In an astonishing protest, Baptists converged from all over the Soviet Union for a mass demonstration outside the Central Committee building in Moscow. Several days later, Vins went to the Central Committee with other leaders to ask about the fate of those who had been detained at the unprecedented demonstration. They were themselves arrested. Vins and another colleague finally went on trial in November 1966 and he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. His wife, Nadezhda, was left to look after their four children.

After release, Vins resumed his work as pastor and organiser of the movement, but soon had to go into hiding to avoid arrest. He was finally discovered and seized in March 1974. Prodded by the human rights campaigner Andrei Sakharov, the World Council of Churches finally joined the international protests at Vins'

arrest. Vins was tried in Kiev in January 1975 and sentenced to five years in labour camp to be followed by five years' internal exile, becoming the Soviet Union's most famous religious prisoner. International pressure finally led to his dramatic expulsion from his homeland.

Vins' work aiding Baptist victims of persecution changed dramatically in the late 1980s, when open Christian work became possible. In 1990 President Gorbachev revoked the decree that had stripped Vins of his Soviet citizenship, thereby allowing him to revisit his homeland. In the 1990s Vins made numerous preaching trips, especially in Russia and Ukraine. In 1995 he was allowed access to Moscow to his father's KGB case file, and it was with mixed emotions that Vins finally learnt that his father had been executed in 1936. But reading the record of his father's interrogation he realised that throughout his own battles with the Soviet authorities he had been following in his father's footsteps.

Vins was a thoughtful leader with a certain presence. Although he had taken a hard line over the split in the Baptist Union in the early 1960s, he later felt a little uncomfortable with the aggressively uncompromising stand taken by many of his former colleagues. Split within the Council of Churches over the past few years caused him much sadness and he was unhappy with those in Russia who called themselves Vinsites.

When he discovered late last year that he had a malignant inoperable brain tumour, he faced up to it with courage. He had already successfully undergone heart bypass surgery in the late 1980s, but this time treatment was unsuccessful. "The Lord is powerful and could shrink my tumour," he said. "But if not and God calls me to Heaven, I won't be sorry to go!"

— Felix Corley



Wells at the London Blues Festival, 1995

Photograph: Dave Peabody / Redferns

Ian Moores

Ian Richard Moores, footballer born Silverdale, Staffordshire 5 October 1954; played for Stoke City 1972-76, Tottenham Hotspur 1976-78, Orient 1978-82, Bolton Wanderers 1982-83, Barnsley (on loan) 1983; married (two sons); died Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire 12 January 1998.

There was a time when his blond, bearded Ian Moores was being touted as an England centre-forward in the making.

Indeed, while cutting a dash with his first professional club, Stoke City, in the mid-1970s, he made two international appearances at under-23 level. But, having achieved a seemingly ideal career move to Tottenham Hotspur, Moores faded disappointingly from the limelight.

Moores made his senior debut for the Potters, then a force in the old First Division and one of the most entertaining sides in the land, in April 1974. The next season, though not a regular member of the team, he learnt quickly from such immensely gifted colleagues as Jimmy Greenhoff and Alan Hudson, and played a telling part in the club's impressive League form. Had the City squad been extensive enough to cope with an injury crisis of crippling proportions, the 20-year-old Moores might have pocketed a championship medal.

He attracted attention from a host of leading clubs, and after he had played what was to prove the most compelling football of his life during the subsequent campaign, earning his international recognition in the process, he joined Spurs for £75,000 in August 1976.

Now came a period of golden opportunity for Moores and he began with a goal in a stirring victory against Manchester United at Old Trafford. But although his aerial power was fearsome and sometimes he could apply a delicate touch that was surprising in such a strapping fellow, too often he appeared cumbersome and gauche. With the north Londoners suffering relegation from the top flight at the end of his first term at White Hart Lane, the fans lost patience and his star began to fall.

There was one memorable day in the Second Division when he contributed a hat-trick to Tottenham's 9-0 trouncing of Bristol Rovers, but such bounty was rare.

In October 1978, with hopes of full England honours long gone, Moores accepted a £55,000 switch to Second Division Orient (as Leyton Orient were called at the time), whom he served competently for four seasons, usually at centre-forward but occasionally in midfield. He was released when the Os were demoted in 1982, going on to brief stints with Bolton Wanderers and Barnsley (on loan) and a spell with Apollon in Cyprus. Thereafter several non-League clubs and Landskrona, a club of Sweden afforded him the outlets for the talents of a man for whom expectations had once been so high.

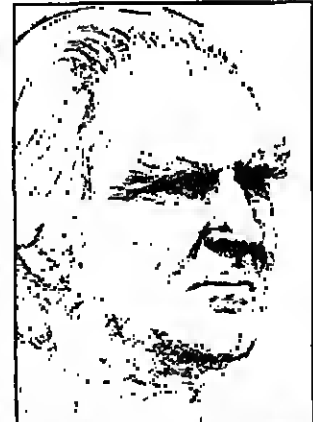
— Ivan Ponting

Francis Skinner

Russell Thomas Francis Skinner, architect born Kuala Lumpur 13 October 1908; married 1966 Josephine Wadey (one daughter); died Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk 6 January 1998.

Francis Skinner was the last surviving of the seven original members of Tecton, the pioneering architectural practice formed under Berthold Lubetkin in 1932 that dominated the formative period of the Modern Movement in Britain. Skinner was Lubetkin's closest colleague, who shared and supported his charismatic partner's belief in modern architecture as an instrument of social progress.

Born in Kuala Lumpur the eldest of three brothers and two sisters, Francis Skinner was "sent home" to England at an early age to be brought up by a



Skinner: drawn by his wife

maternal aunt in Reading. Entering the Architectural Association in 1927 he became disenchanted with the traditionalist teaching and focused on the radical developments in Europe, many of which he had visited by 1930. A contemporary recalls him reducing an AA stu-

dio master to tears in a school with his scheme for a Florentine Renaissance church composed entirely of exposed RSJs. His first building, a prize-winning reinforced concrete house for the Modern Homes Exhibition at Gidea Park was completed in 1934 when he was only 26.

"Freddie" Skinner was deeply engaged in the political struggles of the 1930s, being a committed member of the Communist Party and the secretary and driving force of the Architects & Technicians Organisation, which campaigned for better housing conditions and building practices. He was also active in the AASTA (Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants) and ABT (Association of Building Technicians), which promoted unionisation of building workers and salaried staff.

This activity was all pursued alongside his work in Tecton, where, as for Lubetkin, his political and professional aspirations converged most closely in the work for Finsbury Council, beginning with the Health Centre completed in 1938 and now listed Grade I. The same year Skinner visited Spain to study the effects of aerial bombardment in the Civil War, his findings contributing to Tecton's controversial scheme of deep bomb-proof shelters for Finsbury. Though these eventually came to nothing his knowledge was re-applied during the Second World War when he served with the Royal Engineers and volunteered for bomb disposal work, having found routine duties too dull.

Tecton's work resumed after the war with the housing projects at Spa and Priory Green, Paddington and Holford Square.

Skinner seeing through the Finsbury schemes during Lubetkin's tenure at Peterlee. Skinner declined an invitation from Le Corbusier to join him at Chandigarh in 1950 but continued with major housing developments in Bethnal Green, Hackney and Southwark in the reformed firm of Skinner, Bailey & Lubetkin. This arrangement, whereby Skinner played a key but generally unacknowledged role in running the practice, enabled Lubetkin to remain professionally active during the period when he is widely but mistakenly supposed to have forsaken architecture for farming.

Francis Skinner, the only founding member of Tecton to stay with Lubetkin for his entire professional life, once described his celebrated partner as "the most complete architect you could imagine – a brilliant designer, knowledgeable about

structure, very persuasive with clients and a good organiser". But he modestly omitted to mention the qualities he himself brought to their association that made it so durable – a critical appreciation of Lubetkin's vision, a comparable aesthetic sensibility and the inexhaustible dedication and tenacity needed to produce buildings of lasting significance. Their compatible personalities and the complementary nature of their gifts resulted in a unique body of work that neither could have achieved on his own.

Skinner retired in the 1970s to Suffolk, where he continued with various personal projects, including teaching himself Russian and making an extensive study of historic houses and castles. Typically, he approached these not from a sentimental or tourist perspective but as manifestations of Britain's social

structure and political development. With his wife Jo, a professional artist and accomplished geologist, he would embark on several tours each year, carefully planned around the locations of their objectives – a series of buildings in his case, a group of fossil sites in hers. Their mutual devotion accommodated these different interests with characteristic generosity, travelling in separate camper vans to pre-agreed destinations where they would reunite each evening to discuss the day's exploits.

Behind Francis Skinner's innate reticence lay unshakeable egalitarian ideals and a profound belief in the essential humanism of art and science. The very embodiment of George Orwell's phrase "the crystal spirit", he was steadfast, gentle and true.

— John Allan

FAITH & REASON

'No room at the Dome for Jesus.' Quite right too

Peter Mandelson has assured church leaders that Christianity will be central to his millennium celebrations. Huw Spunner wonders whether that is such a good idea.

There are calls from many quarters for a strong showing of Christianity in the Millennium Experience. "No room at the Dome for Jesus," complains the *Daily Telegraph*. "Whose millennium is it anyway?" ask others (somewhat disingenuously, since Christ's 2,000th birthday falls in 2001, even if you accept the official birthdate). Even the Bishop of Oxford has joined in.

But the prospect inspires a vague unease. Perhaps it is just a question of context: Christians who regret that religion is listed under leisure pursuits in government surveys of social trends may regret even more if it becomes a "dimension" of a lottery-funded, corporate-sponsored designer celebration of... Of what? No one yet knows. What hopes or dreams or New Millennium resolutions the nation is supposed to embrace in Mandelson's Dome remain a mystery.

As much of his "vision" as he has so far revealed amounts to "I have seen the future and it's playing surfball."

In any event, how could Christianity be exhibited there? How could you advertise the Celestial City in *Unity Fair*? The values that the Dome seems already to embody – style before substance, pleasure before commitment, pride in our own achievements and a good feeling about our selves – stand in contradiction of the values of the Sermon on the Mount. One suspects that Jesus's legacy as interpreted in the Experience would anyway be a matter of the cultural ephemera: from stained-glass windows to "rave" worship.

And what do we mean by Christianity? To the vast majority of people, it is a human construct, a system (or muddle) of beliefs and practices. In that sense, every manifestation of it is authentic, and any account of its impact on our history is dishonest if it does not acknowledge the bad as much as the good. If Christianity is given credit for the building of cathedrals, it must also take the blame for the burning of "witches" (though both were probably as much the product of superstition or local politics as of anything else). Is

this historical curate's egg what the faithful want to celebrate?

But Christianity itself claims not to be a human construct but to be truth, single and unchanging though imperfectly understood. On its own terms, it cannot be a mixed blessing, because everything that is wrong (in any sense) is by definition foreign to it: anything or anyone that does not bear good fruit is not truly Christian. This is the account that most believers would want to give – but in the hyped-up atmosphere of the Dome it would sound like so much more corporate PR. And there is another factor to complicate any official celebration of the true essence of Christianity: it is God who judges what is good and what is true, and his judgements are not yet revealed. And no doubt they'll be very different from ours.

Why are people so anxious that the Experience should have a Christian element? One reason, perhaps, is that as we leave the 20th century and the second millennium behind, the feeling will be strong that we are closing a chapter (if not a book) and beginning a fresh one. The dawning of a new age may not have seemed very convincing in the Sixties or the Eighties, but the magic of the

number 2000 will create a more powerful illusion. On 1 January that year, even the day before will seem like ancient history; it's the future that will fill our horizons. Christianity can easily be presented in that context as a relic of yesterday, whilst science and technology and the 101 ways we can now amuse ourselves to death can be proclaimed as tomorrow's world.

How, then, can Christians demonstrate that true religion is a thing of the present and the future, where we should go and not just where we have come from? Perhaps the most effective exhibition at the turn of the millennium would be for the churches to sell off everything not essential to the practice of the faith – all the pomp and the palaces and the accumulated treasure of centuries of not obeying the teachings of Jesus – and use the proceeds to write off Mozambique's foreign debt. And perhaps they could do it in 2001. It would give the rest of us a year to observe, once the glittering surface of the new millennium is a little scratched, that human nature never changes. And nor does the challenge of the Sermon on the Mount.

• Faith & Reason is edited by Paul Valley

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 4DL, telephoned to 0171-253 2011 or faxed to 0171-253 2010, and are charged at £4.50 a line (VAT extra). Please include a daytime telephone number. The OBITUARIES e-mail address is obituaries@independent.co.uk

Lectures

TODAY
National Gallery: Rebecca Drew, "Home and Heath (II)" Velázquez, Kitchen Scene with Christ in the House of Martha and Mary", 12pm.
Victoria and Albert Museum: Alex Buck, "Craft and Guild Work shops 1860-1920", 2.30pm.
Tate Gallery: Laurence Bradbury, "Five Thousand Words on Minimalism", 1pm.
British Museum: Della Pemberton, "A Journey Through the Underworld: ancient Egyptian views of the afterlife", 1.15pm.
National Portrait Gallery: Paul Webb, "Victorian Theatrical and Musical Personalities", 3pm.

Changing of the Guard

TODAY The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am. Nijmegen Cavalry Grenadier Guards mount the Queen's Guard at Buckingham Palace, 11.30am, hand provided by the Irish Guards. **TOMORROW** The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 10am.

Birthdays

TODAY: Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, Consultant and Chargé de Mission to the UN Secretary-General, 65; Mr Muhammad Ali, former boxing champion, 56; Sir John Boyd, former ambassador to Japan, 62; Lord Carter, Government Chief Whip in the House of Lords, 65; Mr Christopher Carberry, ambassador to Romania, 52; Sir Mervyn Davies, former High Court Judge, 80; Sir Edward Fessenden, radar pioneer, 86; Mrs Monica Furlong, writer, 68; Mr Neil Gamble, Headmaster, Ender School, 55; Mr Damian Green MP, 41; Mlle Françoise Hardy, singer and songwriter, 54; Mr Anthony Kenney, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, 56; The Right Rev Nigel McCulloch, Bishop of Wakefield, 56; Mr Kenneth Minton, chairman, John Mowlem, 61; Sir Geoffrey Pattie, former MP, 62; Professor William Robertson, pathologist, 75; Mr Vidal Sassoon, hair stylist, 70; Miss Moira Shearer, former ballerina, 72; Mr Richard Smethurst, Provost, Worcester College, Oxford, 57; Sir Clyde Walcott, Chairman, International Cricket Council, 72; Dame Gillian Weir, concert organist, 57; Mr Paul Young, singer, 42. **TOMORROW:** Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, 65; Mr Marshall Sir Alfred Ball, 77; Mr Peter Beardsley, footballer, 37; Dr David Bellamy, botanist, 65; Sir Michael Bett, First Civil Service Commissioner, 63; Mr John Boorman, film director, 65; Mr Raymond Briggs, author and illustrator, 64; Mr David Burke, Chief Constable, North Yorks, 59; Mr John Carr, former Chairman, Countryside Commission of Scotland, 71; Mr Iain Coleman MP, 39; Mr Kevin Costner, actor, 43; Mr Richard Dunwoody, jockey,

34; Mr Christian Fittipaldi, racing driver, 27; The Hon Sir Rocco Forte, former chairman, Forte, 53; Mr Paul Freeman, actor, 58; Lord Goodhart QC, 65; Mr David Grant, former Lord-Lieutenant of the County of Durham, 76; Miss Dawn Guinness, former Headmistress, Felstead House, 52; Sir James Hann, chairman, Hickson International, 65; Sir William Harding, former chairman, 61; Sir Robert Hicks, former MP, 60; Lord Higgins, former MP, 70; Mr John Hougham, Chairman, Aca, 61; Lord Howell of Guildford, former government minister, 62; Mr John Hume MP, 61; Mr Edward James, former diplomat, 81; Dame Jennifer Jenkins, former Chairman, the National Trust, 77; Mr Paul Keating, former prime minister of Australia, 54; Mr Martin Laing, chairman, John Laing, 56; Sir Godfrey Le Queux, Judge of Courts of Appeal, Jersey and Guernsey, 74; Mr Mark Ryance, artistic director, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 38; Sir Walter Vero, former Secretary, Order of the Garter, 91; Sir Ralph Verney, former Vice-Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, 83; Sir Clive Whitmore, former Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Home Office, 63; Sir Alan Whitmore, former director, Exchange and Trade Relations Department, IMF, Home Office, 72.

Anniversaries

TODAY: Births: Anne Brontë ("Acton Bell"), novelist, 1820; Al (Alphonse) Capone, gangster, 1899. Deaths: Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni, composer, 1751. Today is the Feast Day of St Antony the Abbot, St Genulf or Genou, St Julian Sabas, St Richimur, St Sabinius of Piacenza, Saints Spenstipus, Eleasippus and Metastippus and St Salpichus II or Sulpicus of Bourges.

MARKET REPORT

Flight to quality sends blue chips soaring

Shares, at least the blue-chip variety, were given every encouragement to put on an impressive display—and did not disappoint.

With Asian markets looking stronger, New York putting on a positive show and the monthly futures expiry going so smoothly it was almost unnoticed the stock market was confident and relaxed.

The so called "flight to quality", prompted by Asian alarms, has directed even more attention on blue chips, particularly those with little, if any, Asian exposure.

In busy trading Footsie surged 111.0 points to 5,277.2, its first century for five weeks. At the close the score had been trimmed to 97.3 at 5,263.1.

Vodafone, reflecting a mixture of trading and take over hopes, led the blue chip charge with a 34p jump to 483p. But it was a pitiful time for the constituents of the FTSE 250 index.

The blame for their lacklustre performance was laid, rightly or wrongly, at the door of the market makers of BZW. They had been told to end the week, it was alleged, with balanced books and found themselves forced to cut some of their positions.

With BZW, now part of Credit Suisse First Boston and suffering the indignity of redundancies, such manoeuvres are distinctly possible.

Groups with extensive Far Eastern exposures also missed the party. Rolls-Royce dived 7.5p to 206p and British Aerospace was lowered 11p to 1.605p. BTR found yet another low, off 5.75p to 160p and engineer Siebe gave up 47p to 1.047p.

Retailers had a mixed time with Argos registering disappointment with its festive display, falling 63p to 442p, lowest for two years.

dine continued, down 6p to 20p. In the summer of 1996 the price touched 219p as hopes bloomed that new chief executive Ann Iverson would restore the group's fortunes. She left the company in November.

Said one dealer: "Investors are bailing out while the company is still in business". Dixons remained depressed on its sales misadventure, falling a further 7p to 498p. The shares have lost 84p since Wednesday's downbeat

Supermarkets had another eventful session with Asda jumping 8p to 195p in heavy trading. Take over rumours continued to swirl but the activity could have been due to the futures expiry. There was also talk of US buying interest.

Safeway, Asda's suspected target, added 11.25p to 366p and Tesco hardened 11p to 512p. On Monday it will become the first major supermarket chain to announce on Christmas trading.

The fledgling IT sector had another rip-roaring session as fund managers were forced to increase their exposure. Logica jumped 77.5 to a 1,287.5p peak and Sage 35p to 952.5p.

Disappointing figures from City Centre Restaurants took a \$5.5p hit out of the shares at 17.5p.

Source: Datastream

Rentokil Initial, the environmental and property services group, hardened 9.5p to 29.5p as Sophus Berendse, the Danish company which once had a controlling stake, split itself into two. SB retains the trading activities, ranging from electronics to textile services, and 3.6 per cent of Rentokil. A new company, Ratin, which like SB will be quoted on the Copenhagen stock market, will hold 32.2 per cent of Rentokil. Fears have been expressed that the new Danish company could make Rentokil vulnerable if a hostile takeover were attempted.

On the take over from Sibir Energy improved 3.5p to 44p as Pentex, which has 40 per cent, opened bid talks with the Siberian oil explorer because it has "become apparent to the management that the two companies would need to be merged". Pentex floated Sibir last year.

the shares closing a little firmer at 158p. Volume was nearly 17 million with some chunky lines going through at around 155p.

BTG, the old British Technology Group which is working on a multitude of developments and inventions, including a revolutionary gearbox, jumped 40p to 722.5p ahead of a rumoured investment reception last night for the group's major investors.

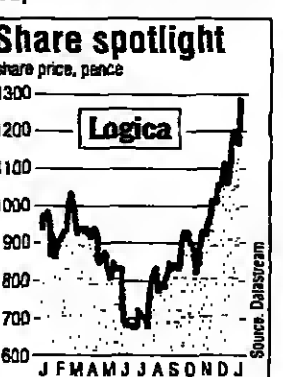
The day's biggest casualty was Compagnie de Participations Financieres, a Luxembourg registered company operating in the German property industry. One of the more obscure AIM shares, it slumped 190p to 307.5p after a bitter dispute between the board and the company's main shareholder came into the open. Two directors have quit and the rest will depart after a shareholders meeting next month. It came to AIM just

TAKING STOCK

Nord Anglia, the education group, jumped 39p to a 319p peak, after buying a New Zealand college. The shares arrived a year ago at 140p, falling to 132.5p before starting their surge. The company should be a beneficiary of the Government's privatisation plans for failed schools. Stockbroker Henry Cooke Lumsden is bullish. It forecasts profits of £2.7m this year with £3.1m slotted in for the following year.

Ankett Associates, a building design practice, improved 0.5p to 5.5p as directors, including chairman Gerry Deighton, purchased 300,000 shares. Stockbroker Ellis & Partners forecast earning per share will increase from 0.56p to 0.71p this year.

Robert Earl, the restaurant tycoon who runs Planet Hollywood, has cut his stake in Pemberton's, the wine bar chain, to below 3 per cent. The shares held at 17.25p

[illegible]

Poor Christmas at Argos prompts job cutbacks

Argos, the catalogue retailer, is cutting 230 jobs as part of a 'fundamental review of costs' after it reported disappointing Christmas sales for the second year running. Nigel Cope, City Correspondent, reports on the decline of a former stock market star.

Argos shares fell by 12.5 per cent yesterday after the company said like for like sales in the five weeks to 27 December fell by 1.5 per cent. The company blamed a poor performance in toys, electricals and the jewellery/clocks and watches category. Sales in these three ranges, which account for half of Argos' sales in the run-up to Christmas, fell by five per cent on last year. Argos shares closed 63p lower at 442p. They stood at almost 800p little more than a year ago.

Analysts said Argos had also suffered from a revitalised Woolworths which competes directly against it in areas such as toys. The figures were particularly disappointing, as Argos had added more sales staff this year to prevent the long queues that caused the company problems last Christmas, analysts said.

"It has raised significant concerns both in the City and within the company itself," said Ashley Thomas at SG Securities. "The fact that they are planning a series

of initiatives suggests the tougher trading conditions are here to stay."

Argos is just the latest in a string of downbeat announcements from retailers this week, suggesting that the early post-Christmas optimism from the high street was misplaced. There have been profits warnings from Laura Ashley and La Senza as well as poor figures from Sears and House of Fraser.

Some said the downbeat trading update would increase pressure on the company to return its cash pile to shareholders rather than gear up for an acquisition. "Given they are operating in a mature market, people may like to see some cash coming back," said one analyst.

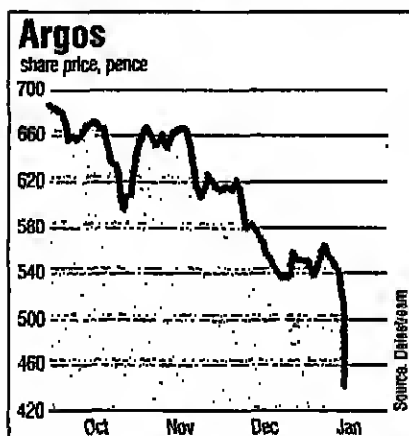
Argos had average net cash of £137m last year. It returned £93m to shareholders in 1996 through a 40p per share special dividend.

As part of cost cutting programme designed to free up resources for investment elsewhere in the group, Argos is to cut 100 jobs at its Milton Keynes head office and 130 at its Welwyn Garden City warehouse, which is being closed. However, the company is to create 1,000 jobs this year as part of a programme to open 31 new shops.

It also plans to pilot a home shopping service in August. Under this system, any product in stock can be ordered and paid for over the telephone and delivered to the customers' home or picked up at the shop within 24 hours of ordering. Argos home shopping service will be rolled out nationally in 1999. The service is expected to be loss-making this year but to turn in a profit in its first full year of operation. Additional costs will be incurred for new telephone systems, a call centre and a delivery network.

Analysts downgraded this year's profits from £146m to around £125m, after exceptional. For the following year some have downgraded from £165m to £140m.

The company said 1997's profits would be affected by investments in its new Dutch business, costing £3m, and £7m of additional provisions related to the cost-cutting exercise. This is expected to reduce costs by £7m a year.



An executive from Asda yesterday held a meeting with the supermarket's suppliers - Procter & Gamble and Lever Brothers - in the lavatories of the Majestic Hotel in Harrogate. The facilities at the hotel have won an award for high standards

PIA 'names and shames' five firms

Five leading firms offering independent financial advice were "named and shamed" by the Personal Investment Authority, the industry's watchdog, yesterday.

The action came as Helen Liddell, the Economic Secretary, warned that there would be no let-up in the quest for redress in the £4bn pensions mis-selling scandal.

The PIA's announcement, sparked by the apparent failure of the five companies to meet the latest regulatory deadline, was an embarrassment for two leading figures in UK financial services.

It was the second "naming and shaming" for DBS Financial, chaired by Ken Davy, once a PIA board member. Countrywide Independent, run by Jim Gaskin, also numbered among the five companies now potentially facing hefty PIA fines. Mr Gaskin is a former deputy chief executive of Fimbra, the financial services regulator.

Burns Anderson Independent, Financial Options and IFA Network were also named by the PIA.

All five firms apparently failed to meet the PIA's requirement that 90 per cent of priority cases should be resolved by the end of 1997.

Commenting on the announcement, Ms Liddell said companies failing to meet deadlines "must face the consequences". She warned there would be "no let-up" - from the Government or the regulators. Forty-one firms, including the five named yesterday, are being monitored by the Economic Secretary. These firms have now resolved over half the cases identified for review.

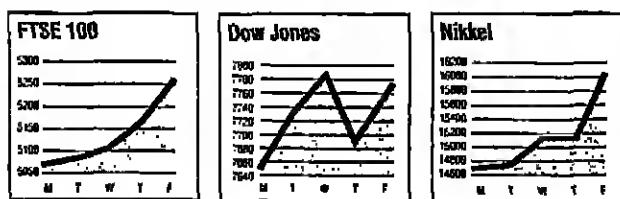
Separately, the Association of British Insurers (ABI) announced yesterday that five product providers had failed to meet mis-selling deadlines.

Guardian Royal Exchange, Reliance Mutual, Royal Liver, GAN Life and Sun Life of Canada failed to resolve 90 per cent of top priority cases by the end of 1997. But regulatory action is unlikely as the five product providers only narrowly missed targets and had made strenuous efforts to meet regulatory deadlines.

To date, the pensions review has led the PIA to impose fines totalling £2m. DBS Financial, one of the five financial adviser firms named yesterday, was fined £425,000 last September and said yesterday "every reasonable endeavour has been made to comply with the PIA's timetable".

Leo Paterson

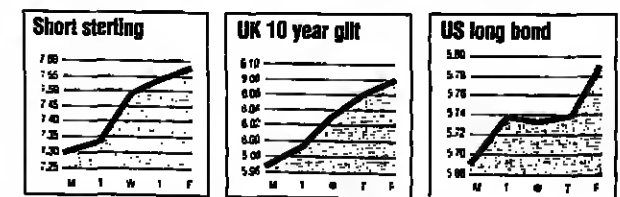
STOCK MARKETS



*Dow Jones index and graph at 5pm

Index	Close	Change	Change(%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield(%)
FTSE 100	5263.10	97.30	1.89	5367.30	4153.20	3.41
FTSE 250	4812.60	-3.70	-0.08	4963.80	4384.20	3.27
FTSE 350	2521.90	37.60	1.51	2570.50	2083.70	3.36
FTSE All Share	2461.56	34.76	1.43	2507.68	2055.17	3.36
FTSE SmallCap	2356.00	8.00	0.26	2407.40	2182.10	2.99
FTSE Realind	1261.00	4.30	0.34	1346.50	1226.20	3.26
FTSE AIM	977.90	-0.50	-0.05	1138.00	865.90	1.09
Dow Jones	7774.71	65.69	1.11	8298.00	6358.78	0.76
Nikkei	16046.48	924.47	6.11	20610.70	14468.21	0.66
Hang Seng	8900.04	321.06	3.74	16820.31	7909.13	4.77
Dax	4184.46	36.12	0.87	4459.88	2970.45	1.76

INTEREST RATES

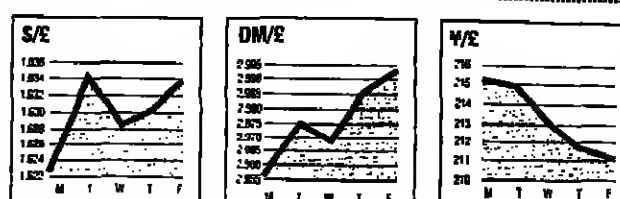


Money Market Rates	1 year	1 yr 6m	10 year	1 yr 6m	10 year	1 yr 6m	10 year
UK	7.61	7.63	6.08	6.08	6.04	6.04	6.04
US	5.83	5.86	5.86	5.86	5.86	5.86	5.86
Japan	0.72	0.72	0.68	0.68	0.68	0.68	0.68
Germany	3.56	3.56	3.82	3.82	5.06	5.06	5.06

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises	Falls
Argos	442.00 -63.00 -12.48
Real Westminister	1070.00 -74.00 -6.82
Nikei	16046.48 -924.47 -5.79
Hang Seng	8900.04 -321.06 -3.58
Dax	4184.46 -36.12 -0.87

CURRENCIES



Pound	Dollar
Dollar	1.6339 +0.38c 1.6574
D-Mark	2.9928 +0.88pt 2.6785
Yen	211.02 -11.55 199.73
2 index	104.90 +0.10 99.60

OTHER INDICATORS

Index	Value	Change	Yr Ago	Index	Value	Change	Yr Ago
Brent Oil (\$)	14.73	-0.11	23.24	Gold (\$)	285.40	2.70	354.55
Gold (\$)	285.40	2.70	354.55	RPI	160.00	3.60	154.44
Silver (\$)	5.89	0.10	4.88	Base Rates	7.25	6.00	

www.bloomberg.com source: Bloomberg

Battle expected to delay launch of competition in electricity industry

John Battle, the energy minister, is next week expected to announce a delay of up to six months to the launch of competition in the domestic electricity market. Michael Harrison reports on the latest setback in plans to liberalise the sector.

Mr Battle is to meet the heads of the 12 regional electricity companies (Recs) and the two Scottish power producers on Thursday to consider a report from PA Consulting, the advisers to Professor Stephen Littlechild, the electricity regulator.

The report is widely expected to conclude that he has no option but to delay the launch of competition because of problems with computer systems and the failure of a

large number of Rees to be ready on time.

The original timetable envisaged competition beginning in April in a limited number of areas and then being phased in throughout the country by September.

It is now possible that the none of the country's 23 million electricity consumers will be able to start shopping around for suppliers until September at the earliest. If the system is not ready in April then financial penalties, levied by Professor Littlechild, will come into effect.

An argument has been raging within the industry as to whether the delay should be three or six months. However, all but two of the Rees, Eastern and Seaboard, have told PA Consulting that competition should be delayed until September in order to ensure that the computer systems have been properly tested.

Eastern and Seaboard, along with Yorkshire and Man-

chester, are the four areas of the country where competition is due to be introduced first. The cities selected are Hull, Chester, Canterbury and Norwich.

But both Manweb, which is owned by Scottish Power and serves Merseyside and North Wales, and Yorkshire, are thought now to have recommended a delay of six months.

One option for Mr Battle and Professor Littlechild is to announce a six-month delay but set a deadline of Christmas for the full phasing-in of competition, so ensuring that all households get a chance to shop around this year.

Those Rees arguing for a delay until September say that even then, it will only give the industry three to four months to test out a computer system that would normally need at least a year to bed down.

They also argue that Professor Littlechild and Mr Battle will be anxious not to have to delay the launch date more

than once. "We are all desperate to see competition work but it is not in anybody's interests to go for an earlier date just to be macho," said one executive.

However, John Devaney, chief executive of Eastern, said: "Three months should be the maximum allowed. If you go for six months then you will get people re-inventing the wheel."

A meeting of the Rees took place last Monday to review the position but at that point the final PA report had not been written. It is expected to be completed next Monday or Tuesday.

A six-month delay would infuriate Centrica, the trading arm of British Gas. It has seen its market share steadily eroded as electricity companies enter the liberalised gas market and is eager to strike back by attacking their markets.

Centrica has called for electricity suppliers which are not ready for competition to be prevented from entering the gas market.

Deep Pan Pizza chain hit by upmarket dining trend

Pizza is proving a turn-off for restaurant goers who are choosing to splash out money on expensive and ever more exotic meals.

The trend has forced City Centre Restaurants (CCR), owner of the Deep Pan Pizza chain, to warn that profits for the year to December will fall short of market expectations, causing the shares to fall 15.5p to 133p.

The poor trading performance has prompted the group to restructure the division. James Naylor, chief executive of CCR, plans to sell or rebrand many of the group's 55 high street sites as part of a strategy to take the group up-market.

Mr Naylor said yesterday: "There has been a drift away from pizza and eating in high street restaurants over the last few years. People have been spending more and trying different things."

CCR confirmed that several potential buyers have already expressed an interest in

some of the Deep Pan sites. Eventually most of the high street stores could disappear. The rest are likely to be refurbished to give them a more modern feel and the chain's name could also be changed. "Deep Pan Pizza has become a bit dated," admitted Mr Naylor.

Despite CCR's disappointing trading figures, Scott Charlesworth, managing director of its Caffé Uno chain, is in line for a huge profit-related bonus. He will receive £800,000 this year on top of a £100,000 pay out last year. Mr Naylor confirmed he is on course to make another £800,000 this year.

Garfunkels and Chiquitos, the Mexican eateries, also grew strongly in the year and, ignoring Deep Pan Pizza, like-for-like sales in December rose 5.8 per cent.

CCR is planning to roll out Wok Wok, its new chain offering Asian delicacies, and is looking at least one new restaurant concept.

Andrew Yates

WH Smith provides for directors' golden parachutes

WH Smith has changed the terms of its directors' service contracts to grant them golden parachutes if the company is taken over.

The move, which may attract the ire of its investors, means that the most senior directors, such as new chief executive Richard Handover, could receive payments of up to £800,000. Mr Handover is on a two-year contract of around £400,000 a year. Other, more recently appointed, directors such as WH Smith Retail managing director Beverley Hodson, have contracts of just one year. John Hancock, the head of the US business, is also on a two-year contract and would qualify for more than £300,000.

The company justified the payments saying it was "simply bringing Smith's into line with current practice." A spokesman

cited other companies such as Cadbury Schweppes, Kingfisher, Barclays Bank and Pearson, saying they all have similar arrangements.

The changes were made last year and reported in WH Smith's accounts published in July. This was just two months before Tim Waterstone made his audacious £180 approach to the company which would have seen him installed as chairman.

A WH Smith spokesman said the payments for loss of office were an additional incentive for the directors to not to abandon the company during a takeover situation. The company declined to comment on whether large pay packages, bonus payments and share option schemes did not already provide sufficient incentive.

Nigel Cope

Allied braces for knock-out bid from US rival Hercules

Allied Colloids, the speciality chemicals group, yesterday predicted that profits for the year to March would rise by more than one-third to £74m and forecasted annual cost savings of £11.5m in its last full defence against a £1.1bn hostile bid from Hercules, its US rival.

However, analysts were predicting that the group was unlikely to retain its independence and that Hercules is preparing to make a knock-out bid for the group by upping its 155p a share offer to around 170p.

David Farrar, chief executive of Allied Colloids, said: "We have a great growth record. The problem is that in the past we have focused on growth rather than profit. In the two and a half years I have been in charge

there has been a huge change in culture."

Allied Colloids claims it should be valued by the market at 174p a share, despite the fact that its shares were languishing at around 115p before the bid.

Hercules branded the defence "uninspiring" and claimed that profit forecasts were exactly in line with analysts' predictions. A spokesman

for the group said yesterday: "They are not promising jam today. It is not even jam tomorrow. It is jam the day after that. Claims that they should be valued by the market at 174p are laughable."

Allied could look for a white knight or even consider a management buy-out if Hercules increases its bid.

Andrew Yates

Diageo set to reveal Far East turmoil has damaged profits

Diageo, the new drinks giant formed by the merger of Guinness and Grand Metropolitan, is expected to announce on Monday that financial turmoil in the Far East will have a severe effect on profits. The warning will come as the group unveils its first ever trading statement.

Analysts believe the problems in Asia will turn out to have a much bigger impact on earnings than first thought as the crisis spreads throughout the continent and threatens to dampen economic growth.

The Far East contributes up to 10 per cent of Diageo's profits. However demand for spirits such as whisky has fallen

as the financial crisis has bitten and there is evidence of customers switching to cheaper, lower margin spirits brands.

The continued slump in the value of Far Eastern currencies will also reduce earnings in pound terms. The brokers Société Générale have knocked £35m off profit forecasts for the year to

June. The cuts mirror moves by other analysts who have reduced earnings estimates by as much as £70m over the next few years.

One drinks analyst said: "Diageo is expected to confirm analysts' predictions that its problems in the Far East have escalated."

Andrew Yates

IA 'names
and shames'
ive firms



JEREMY WARNER ON WHY THE US HAS FAILED TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM OF BILL GATES

How the American dream has come unstuck

There was an excellent piece in the New Yorker magazine this week about the US Justice Department's battle with Microsoft. Timed to coincide with renewed court hearings over whether Microsoft is abusing its position in the Internet browser market, this was the definitive article on the monopoly Bill Gates has managed to establish in personal computer operating system technology, and the way in which he is using this to dominate other key areas of the PC software market.

Up until very recently few have had anything but praise for Mr Gates. In the US he is an icon, the very personification of the American dream and the global triumph of American technology and its free market capitalist system.

Until recently that is. Now that image is beginning to sour, and in the process policy makers have begun to question why it is that both the self-correcting mechanisms of the free market, and America's impressive battery of anti-trust and competition laws, have been unequal to the task of checking the growing power of the Microsoft machine.

Worse, they wonder whether Mr Gates, for so long the man who seemed to epitomise the cutting edge of technology, is not now beginning to act as a brake on technological development and change. And if that's the case, is there not a danger of the US eventually losing its present undisputed lead in computer technology and sales?

Before trying to answer these questions, it is worth making some general points about the nature of businessmen and monopolies. There is nothing particularly odd, new or surprising about the way Mr Gates operates or behaves. It would be wrong to view him, as some do, as an evil genius astride a war like empire set on world domination. That may once have been the model for the successful monopoly enterprise, but it isn't these days. In any case, Mr Gates isn't like that and nor is his company. On the other hand, nobody would quarrel with the contention that he has been particularly ruthless and single minded in the way he has developed, defended and exploited an original great new idea and market opportunity. This is what successful entrepreneurs do.

In a sense, it is the function of business to aspire to monopoly, for that is where the greatest likelihood of survival and spectacular profit lies. Businessmen who fail to keep uppermost in their minds that their whole endeavour should be bent on trouncing the competition, invariably end up getting trounced themselves.

Mr Gates, then, belongs to a glorious (or not so glorious depending on your point of view) tradition of inspired and highly successful businessmen, stretching from John Rockefeller in the late 1800s through Cecil Rhodes in the early part of the century to Rupert Murdoch today. On present showing, Microsoft looks as if it will out-mopolise all these role models.

Monopoly can be achieved in a number of ways. The simplest is to buy it, either by acquiring the competition or by driving it out of business through price cutting - a method known as predatory pricing. In the developed world at least, the first of these routes is now more or less outlawed, though some big companies do still seem to get their consolidating mergers through regulators. The competition authorities both in the US and Europe are also getting better at stamping out predatory pricing, though again there is perhaps a way to go, particularly in Britain.

New industries and technologies offer the opportunity of an entirely different approach to monopoly. Copyright is a tradition as ancient as commerce itself. Hardly anyone would seriously dispute an inventor's right to profit from his own discovery, so international law has rightly been constructed to offer cast iron protection. What this does is to give the inventing individual or company an effective monopoly over the product, at least for a limited period of time. Generally, however, it's not long before the competition comes up with a new and hopefully better version of the same thing.

The trick that Mr Gates managed to pull off was to make his MS-DOS operating system, originally designed for IBM's onslaught on the personal computer market, into what became the industry standard. After that came Windows 95, which has piggy backed off MS-DOS into the same position. Mr

Gates has thus achieved the holy grail of all entrepreneurs, for once the industry standard, everyone has to buy your product even when there are better and cheaper versions in prospect. The market has in effect been locked up. Mr Gates has achieved this, moreover, in the world's fastest growing industry, personal computers.

Quite how he managed it has been the subject of more column inches than the Gulf War. In part, it was simply the snowball effect. Because high tech goods have to be compatible with each other, a product can sweep all before it once a certain critical mass has been achieved. More and more other software products become captive to that standard, making it more invaluable still. Anyone with children who has gone the Apple Mac route to the desktop computer must be only too aware, for instance, of the impossibility of getting the latest wizard computer games in anything other than Windows compatible form.

There is nothing illegal in any of this, but clearly it profoundly distorts the way in which free markets are meant to work. Arguably, there were better alternatives, both to MS-DOS and Windows, but none has come to occupy anything more than a small niche position. Obviously, there's something wrong here, but there's nothing either the market or regulators can do about it. Instead, the Justice Department has chosen to attack Microsoft on its attempt to lock up another area of the market, Internet

browsers. Even before Microsoft launched Internet Explorer, there were growing signs of overtly anti-competitive behaviour.

With Explorer, it became much more contentious. What Microsoft did was directly to link its Explorer product with Windows, so that you could not have Windows without Explorer. Most browsers, which act as a gateway to the Web, are in effect given away, both by Microsoft and rivals. Even so, it is clear what Microsoft is up to here. The strategy is that of maintaining control over all aspects of the desktop, thereby preventing competitors from getting a foot in the door.

In the end, it is for the US authorities to deal with Mr Gates and the threat he poses to the free market system. We all have to use them, but these are almost exclusively US technologies, and it is primarily America's lookout if it fails urgently to address the problem. Obviously we are affected, however. And there is a parallel in Britain, if an inexact one. Rupert Murdoch's TV encryption technology occupies a similar position in subscription TV to that of Microsoft with the PC - you cannot offer pay TV without using his system. The consequent opportunity for abuse is obvious, though to be fair, there is as yet no evidence of him using it. As long as capitalism continues to flourish, there will always be those who aspire to monopoly. What governments and regulators have to be eternally vigilant in remembering is that monopoly is also capitalism's greatest enemy.

Tokyo stock market rises 6 per cent in mini-recovery

The Japanese yen rose and the Tokyo stock market staged a mini-recovery yesterday, rising more than 6 per cent, on renewed hopes that the government would take measures to boost the economy. Stephen Vines reports from Hong Kong.

Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) ended its annual convention yesterday with its leaders firmly focused on the need for measures to inject new life in the economy. Newspaper reports suggested that this would be translated into a new package of stimulus measures to be enacted in a special March budget. The measures are reported to include further income tax cuts and increased spending on public works. It appears that the government will focus more on refilling of the economy than on its previous concern with balancing the budget.

The LDP issued a statement saying: "In line with the determination expressed by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto that Japan will never trigger a global economic recession, we will continue to promptly carry out all possible measures to stabilise the financial system and achieve economic recovery."

The convention also applauded a suggestion that Japanese corporations should be allowed to undertake a mass revaluation of their land holdings, something which has not been done for over two decades. The object would be to provide increased collateral against which banks could either lend more or adjust their existing loans without having to lower borrowing limits.

Although this proposal appears to be very much in the spirit of shuffling the deck chairs on the deck of the Titanic, its ingenuity caught the imagination of investors who are preoccupied by fears of massive corporate defaults on loans.

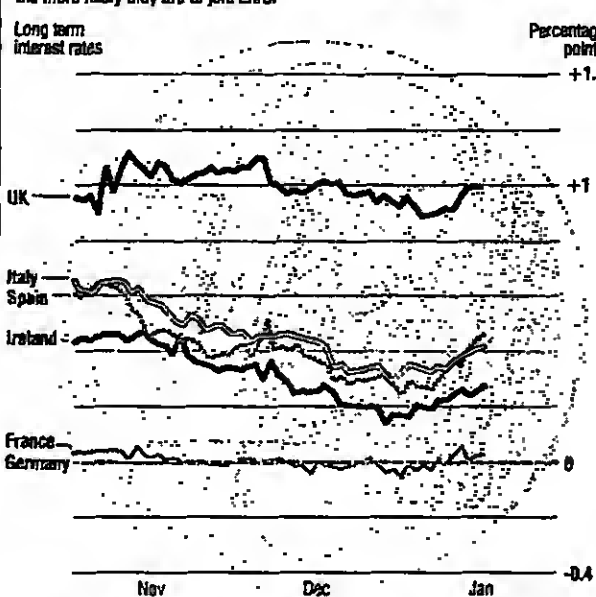
Interestingly, there were signs that foreign buyers had re-entered the Japanese market with enthusiasm yesterday after a period when they had been notable by their absence. News of foreign buying, enhanced by a steady improvement in the value of the yen, encouraged domestic investors to come in behind the overseas investors.

While bank shares rose strongly yesterday, Moody's, the US-based credit-rating agency, injected a mood of caution into the industrial sector by issuing a downgrade on the debt rating of the giant Mitsubishi Motors Corp.

Meanwhile, four former executives of Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank pleaded guilty to illegally giving money to a corporate racketeer as they admitted they had paid him off to ensure that the bank's shareholder meetings proceeded smoothly. The executives are charged with funneling 11.78bn yen (£55.6m) in 52 payments to Ryuichi Koike from July 1994, to September 1995, through a corporate affiliate.

Who will be in EMU? The financial markets' view

The clearer other countries get to the dashed baseline (Germany) the more likely they are to join EMU.



TOWARDS EMU: If the line moves towards the German base line it means investors no longer require such a high premium for holding that country's bonds compared to German ones, because they are confident the currency won't devalue against the mark. In other words, they think that country will be locked into a single currency with Germany in 10 years' time.

AWAY FROM EMU: However, if they think the country won't be in EMU, that it will have higher inflation, and that there is a risk of a future devaluation against the mark, then they will demand an extra premium for holding that country's bonds, so the line will move away from the base.

When will EMU start? The City Analysts' View.

The Independent asked analysts from Nikko Europe, Paine Webber, ABN Amro, JP Morgan, Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, Salomon Brothers, Goldman Sachs, HSBC James Capel, UBS what probability they placed on EMU starting on time

Probability EMU starts on time	87%	(86% last week)
Probability EMU is delayed	10%	(10.5% last week)
Probability EMU never happens	3%	(3.5% last week)

EMU chances take on fresh impetus

The prospects for European Monetary Union emerged from the shadows this week as the Asian economies showed signs of recovery.

The spreads between German mark, securities and some of the smaller European currencies have widened slightly, reversing the long-term trend to convergence, but not enough to cause any real concern, and the view of the experts is increasingly that it is too late now to prevent the narrow EMU going ahead and political risky to stop the broad EMU, containing Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Bundesbank officials continue to warn everyone against complacency, but a legal move to have the German courts rule that replacing the mark is unconstitutional is unlikely to succeed and has not had much impact on the markets. The simmering row between the Dutch and Italians is slightly more serious. But reports that for political reasons the Dutch Finance Minister would oppose Italian membership of the monetary union in the first wave have been played down in the past week.

— Clifford German

CSFB lays off 30 BZW staff following bank purchase

Credit Suisse First Boston (CSFB), the Swiss-American bank, laid off 30 BZW staff in London yesterday. The employees were the first UK casualties of CSFB's purchase of parts of BZW, the investment banking arm of Barclays Bank, last November. A further 150 BZW staff are understood to have been called in for "consultation interviews" to discuss their future, and more redundancies are expected. CSFB said yesterday redundancies would not automatically follow for those called to consultation interviews, but admitted only those staff not called to interview could regard their jobs as secure.

Efficiency cuts at Christie's

Christie's International, the auction house locked in takeover talks with a group of investors led by investment bank SBC Warburg, is laying off 57 staff in the UK and the US as part of its plans to "improve efficiency". The cuts are part of an ongoing review of Christie's operations, and City sources dismissed suggestions that the group was trying to squeeze a better price out of its suitors, who are understood to be carrying out due diligence on the company.

Shares soar in Lorient deal

Shares in Lorient jumped 26p to 559p after the consultancy group unveiled a partnership deal with Baan, the fast-growing Dutch software house. The agreement makes Lorient one of Baan's five UK partners, with exclusive rights to implement the company's Enterprise Resource Planning software in the process manufacturing industry.

Safeway raises bank stakes

Safeway has raised the stakes in the telephone banking war with a new account that will pay up to 7.4 per cent interest on balances over £2,500. The instant access account will be launched on Monday in conjunction with Abbey National. It will pay interest of 6.75 per cent on balances over £500 and 7.3 per cent on balances over £1,000.

National Savings down

Savers put £109m into National Savings in December, bringing the total for the first nine months of the financial year to £1.07bn, compared to £1.3bn at the same stage the previous year. Premium Bonds attracted a net £101m, index-linked certificates £42m and Pensioners' Bonds £25m.

Marlborough takeover

Marlborough International, Ireland's largest recruitment company, has agreed to a reverse takeover of Walker Hamill of the UK for about £17.6m. Marlborough asked for its shares to be suspended pending shareholder approval of the acquisition. Walker Hamill, which is privately owned, specialises in placing accountants, MBAs and strategy consultants, and has offices in London, Reading and Australia.

COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
British Broadcasting (B)	2.50m (2.38m)	0.124m (0.123m)	3.1p (3.2p)	0 (+)
Deputy Commissioner (D)	31.51m (32.64m)	0.519m (0.712m)	1.50p (2.2p)	0 (+)
(F) - Final (I) - Interim				

Peking stands firm behind HK dollar peg

China's central banker yesterday insisted Peking would not devalue the mainland's currency and was standing firm behind Hong Kong's defence of its dollar peg.

The blunt public pronouncements were aimed both at international financiers and opinion at home, where the Asian financial turmoil has caused a slide in the black market value of the renminbi. Dai Xianglong, governor of the People's Bank of China, made the most forthright pledge yet that the Chinese government would not devalue its currency in response to the Asian financial meltdown. A renminbi de-

valuation was "out of the question. We don't have a reason to devalue, nor are we willing to devalue", he said.

The commitment comes ahead of today's arrival in Peking of Michel Camdessus, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, whose bail-out programmes for other Asian countries would be undermined by any Chinese depreciation.

Repeated promises by Peking have failed to quell fears that China may decide to devalue its currency because of rising competition for its exports from south-east Asian countries. Mr Dai said that only 15 per cent of China's

exports were vulnerable to competition from south-east Asian countries.

Rumours of a renminbi devaluation put yet more pressure on the Hong Kong dollar peg to the US currency, which Peking is committed to maintaining. Mr Dai stressed that China's economy was robust. Economic growth will slow this year, he confirmed, but he was confident it would still reach 8 per cent compared with 8.8 per cent in 1997. And the cause of the cooling was a slowdown in township and village enterprises, previously one of the engines of China's economic growth. The central banker

promised "very drastic measures" to restructure China's state banks, confirming that up to 25 per cent of domestic loans were non-performing, of which more than 5 per cent were non-recoverable.

Meanwhile, in Hong Kong the Hang Seng Index rose almost 4 per cent as fears of a default at Sino Group, the property developer, receded. Concern over the property giants was exacerbated by a decision by Moody's, the credit ratings agency, to downgrade British-controlled Swire Group, and Wharf. The pair saw their share price rise, probably reflecting the recent criticism of credit agencies for failing to predict the crisis.

GEC Yarrow safeguards jobs with £500m Brunei order

More than 2,000 jobs were safeguarded at the Clyde-side shipbuilder GEC Yarrow yesterday after the yard secured a £500m order for three offshore patrol vessels from the Sultan of Brunei, the world's richest man.

The contract will also provide work for scores of British sub-contractors including British Aerospace, which is expected to supply its SeaWolf ship-to-air missile system as part of the package.

Work on the contract will begin next year when the Yarrow yard completes existing

contracts to build three Type 23 frigates for the Royal Navy and is expected to keep Yarrow busy for four years.

The yard is also hopeful of winning further export orders following its success in Brunei. South Africa has a similar requirement for offshore patrol vessels and other potential markets include the Gulf States and the Far East.

The vessels are virtually the size of frigates and can be used in a variety of roles ranging from fishery protection to disaster relief and offshore rescue.

— Michael Harrison

BUSINESS AND THE COURTS

JOHN WILLCOCK

Bill Gates's giant Microsoft Corporation is seeing legal action on a whole number of fronts the moment in the US. His week its took action of its won when it launched a writ against Taskmaster Computing Ltd and an individual, Roy Pique, of White Cliffs Business Park, Whitfield in Dover, alleging copyright infringement.

Microsoft's writ says that on 27 October last year Taskmaster sold five products to a company called Lead Glass (Kent) which bore trademarks including Microsoft, Windows and Powerpoint, but which were not manufactured by Microsoft.

The giant software company has retained London-based law firm Linklaters to represent it and lodged a writ on Tuesday in the High Courts demanding an injunction against Taskmaster and damages, amongst other things.

Across the pond, Microsoft is itself facing an anti-trust case brought by the US Justice Department, which claims it is violating a 1995 consent decree by mak-

ing personal computer manufacturers "Bundle" its Internet browser with its Windows 95 product.

Nine US States have launched their own probes into whether the company is using anti-competitive practices. All of which is being contested by Microsoft.

I've been waiting to write a story headlined "Battle of the Urinals" for a long time. Some pungent litigation is due to reach court this spring between Greenhill Services of Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, and Washroom International, of Cliftonville, Kent.

Greenhill has an exclusive licence to all rights in a waterless urinal system called "WhiffAway", which industry analysts have tipped as a big future seller.

Last year Greenhill made an agreement with Washroom making the latter the exclusive distributor of the system in the UK and Europe for 10 years. Under the deal Washroom undertook not to sell rival systems. Now Greenhill is claiming that Washroom is mar-

keting a rival system, IQ Waterfree Urinal System. Greenhill wants damages and an injunction against Washroom.

John Rhodes of Campbell Hooper is representing Greenhill and won an interlocutory order from Mr Justice Popplewell stopping Washroom from breaching the conditions of the contract.

This decision went to the Court of Appeal, where Sir John Balcombe let the earlier injunction stand, saying that certain claims by Washroom had already been "pooh poohed" by a High Court judge.

How refreshing to see a senior member of the Judiciary expressing himself in such earthy terms.

Enso & Byfield, a Southampton firm, are representing Washroom. Oh, and if you want to see either of the rival urinals in action, I'm advised, go to any Granada midday service station.

Richard Branson was being cross-examined yesterday in the libel case between the Virgin boss and Guy Snowden, founder and

head of GTEch, the American lottery contractor.

Throughout the case, which kicked off at the High Court this week, Mr Branson has been accompanied by his father, Ted Branson.

Mr Branson senior, 79, is a distinguished former barrister himself, and ended his career as a Stipendiary Magistrate. His success at the Bar enabled him to send young Richard to Stowe, the public school. Ted lives with his wife Eve Branson on the south coast, near Chichester. Ted's other claim to fame is that he is a former "desert rat". He fought with the British Army in North Africa during the second world war, and was decorated. Richard Branson is being represented by George Carman QC, while Mr Snowden has Richard Ferguson QC.

The case, which is expected to last four weeks, is being heard by Mr Justice Moreland, who heard the Jamie Bulger case.

A judgement is expected to be delivered next Wednesday over the Alan Clark

case, in which the former Government minister is seeking an injunction and damages against the London Evening Standard over the newspaper's spoof "Alan Clark Diary".

Geoffrey Hobbs QC, on Mr Clark's behalf, accused the paper of "false attribution of authorship". Meanwhile, this week the Evening Standard continued to publish the spoof diary pending the judgment.

Word reaches me of an intriguing writ lodged recently by the Ministry of Sound, the south-east London nightclub headed by Jamie Palumbo, against a Ms Cosgrave. Solicitors acting on behalf of the Elephant & Castle rave venue were reluctant to discuss the case, except to say that "Ms Cosgrave was offered the opportunity to answer the allegations through her solicitors prior to the commencement of proceedings, but [the Ministry] regarded the responses she provided as unsatisfactory." What allegations? I'll bring you the writ in full next week.



aged profits



Pagan ritual: Two Morris dancers taking a rest during the Straw Bear Festival in Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire, a 17th-century rite resurrected in 1980, in which a straw bear, as a mascot for a good harvest in coming years, is paraded around the town by folk dancers from all over the world. This photograph, by Jason Orton, was taken with a Nikon F90, using a 50mm lens on 800 Asa film, 1/250th of a second at f8. To order a print, price £15, telephone 0171-293 2534

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TIME OFF

TRAVEL, LEISURE & SPORT

Saturday 17 January 1998



Sacrifice at every step: at the festival of Thaipusam, the human peacocks must rise above their pain – spikes pierce bare chests and backs, cheeks and tongues are lanced with skewers

Photograph: Alain Evard/Rupert Harding Picture Library

Dirty dancing in Orchard Road

As human peacocks paraded through the streets and a carnival atmosphere came into full swing, Amar Grover discovered a very different face of Singapore.

This was not quite the Singapore one expected and, frankly, what a relief. I'd been hovering in a temple compound since the crack of dawn. Families clustered tightly as drastic things were done to brothers, sisters and friends. I made way for an unsteady young man in bright yellow swimming-trunks. A large, spiked frame was pinned to his torso. There were cheers and chanting. The human peacock stepped forward and embarked gingerly upon the strange road of Thaipusam.

This is the most flamboyant festival of Singapore's Hindu community. Each year on the day of the full moon in the month of Thai (late January or early February), thousands of devotees wind through four kilometres of the city's streets. Roads are blocked, traffic is di-

verted and even dirt makes a stately appearance. There are mounds of orchids and marigolds, sticky smashed coconuts and feverish incantations. But what really sets this spectacle apart are the kavadis.

Kavadi means, literally, "sacrifice at every step" and it surely feels just like that. Each human peacock sports a steel and aluminium cage-like frame weighing up to 20kg. Their elaborate plumage – feathers, tassels, flowers, inset pictures of idols – rests on shoulder pads yet is balanced by spikes that pierce bare chests and backs. Hooks and bars tug none too gently: cheeks and tongues are lanced with skewers. This is faith, not mind, over matter.

Thaipusam has its roots in Tamil India. Legend relates how a simple villager embarked on a journey to pay homage to Lord Subramaniam, son of the mighty god Shiva. Milk pots of which weighed down his shoulders, was the only modest offering, song the only effective relief. It was an arduous trek and for this penance he was handsomely blessed.

Yet there is nothing remotely pastoral about today's

kavadi hearers, who are mostly urbane and unfreakish. The newspapers had sampled participants; a civil servant aged 61 (enduring this for the 30th year since being cured of cirrhosis of the liver); an insurance agent who had lost his cancerous leg, and was quoted as saying: "I keep thinking what God has done for me."

The thrust of all this display is atonement, to give thanks or fulfill vows made to Lord Sub-

ramaniam. Their everyday concerns – business prosperity, exam success, continued health or survival – are wrought larger than life. And just as reason appears suspended, pain is inhibited.

I asked about pain, but few clear answers were forthcoming. "Correct spiritual preparation is vital," lectured one young man. The peacocks fast and lead an abstinent life for at least three days, possibly a

month, before the great day. Pain may indicate that preparations were not up to par, and should it be unbearable ... well, the peacock is in serious trouble.

Devotees plus entourage had gathered overnight at the Perumal Temple. There were prayers and offerings before makeshift altars. With garlanded vases balanced on their heads, women initiated the day's procession to Chettiar

Temple. It is not a shy route: participants take in downtown Singapore, even skirting Orchard Road, a major shopping thoroughfare.

As drums throbbed erratically, I watched kavadis being adjusted. An ungainly fan of prongs must fit matching sockets. One lot struggled for what must have seemed an eternity to its bearer. The relief when it finally docked was unmistakable: to fail before baving

properly begun would be disastrous. Few can face what would amount to Lord Subramaniam's almost unheard-of rejection.

Then came oranges. Not the freshly squeezed version, but a precious casting-away-of-evil-spirits variety. Ten, 20 at a time were hung from backs, chest and thighs by harbs and books, as were small brass pots dribbling rivulets of milk. And finally, those long, three-pronged skewers pushed through tongues and cheeks.

Against this stoical drama, perhaps the oddest reactions were from those making most noise. A few individuals shrieked uncontrollably, twitched like rag dolls or writhed on the ground amid the mess – and they hadn't even been pricked. "It is Lord Subramaniam," observed an elderly man. "He enters the people. They have a trance." He seemed a little doubtful.

All this holiness and bystoria is, thankfully, tempered by a carnival atmosphere. Family and friends come to send off every bird of prayer and they need some light relief. Food stalls are crammed into the tem-

ple compound, and there are inopportune parties and picnics. Cafes and restaurants line the first third of the route. With all those spikes and skewers, policemen direct the flow to avoid spidery gridlocks, and ambulances hover discreetly.

I followed the procession through Little India, down Serangoon Road and on to Tank Road. Devotees strained and often nearly buckled under their loads; some leaned on walking sticks, panting. Egged on by shouts or triumphant resolve, others danced and twirled to music and song.

Hours later, at the end of it all, there is a long queue to enter Chettiar Temple. Standing in the damp heat seemed the cruelest of tests. Whatever milk remains is poured on the deity's feet, and only then will those kavadis be dismantled, bars unhooked and skewers withdrawn. Three days later, the villager who unwittingly began it all is honoured with special prayers. And the birds anticipate a year – perhaps even a life – of happiness and prosperity.

This year the festival of Thaipusam takes place on 10 February.

SWINGING INTO SINGAPORE

Getting there: Quest Worldwide (0181-547 3322) is offering a fare of £402 return on Singapore Airlines which flies direct from Heathrow or Manchester to Singapore. The same agency charges just £372 if you fly on Malaysia Airlines from Heathrow with a stopover in Kuala Lumpur. Singapore Airlines (0181-747 0007) has a special deal. "Singapore Spectacular", at £425 including economy air fare, three nights' accommodation on a twin-sharing basis, breakfast, airport transfer and city tour, until 30 April.

Where to stay: the Singapore

Airlines package deal looks all the more impressive when you see the rates charged by hotels.

The Raffles Hotel (00 65 337 1886) is a must if cost is not a consideration. Room prices start at £296 per night. A cheaper alternative is the Imperial Singapore (00 65 737 1666) where rates start at £80. A definite plus is that it is within walking distance of the Chettiar Temple.

More information: Singapore Tourism Board, 1st floor, Carrington House, 126-130 Regent Street, London W1R 5FE (0171-437 0033).



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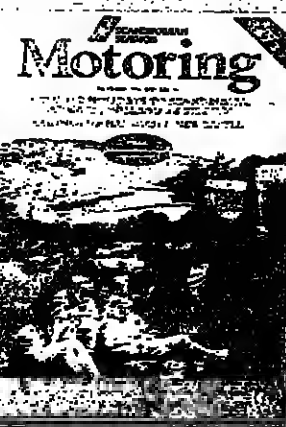
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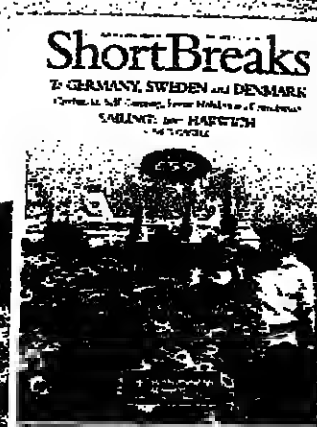
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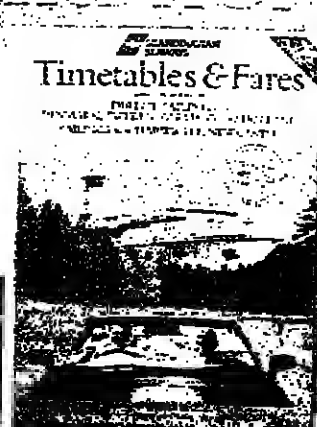
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Monuments to a defeated heresy



Ruined refuge of the Cathars: Château d'Aguliar, near Tuchan

Photograph: Ann Osborne/Robert Harding Picture Library

Set mainly in the Corbières region of France are 20 or so ruined castles, former bastions of the Cathars, perched high on craggy rocks. Here your breath will be taken away by the views, the settings – and the history, writes Emily Passmore.

The Corbières region is one of the poorest in France, so you won't find it crammed with tourist shops and restaurants. But a trip is well worth while if what you want is seclusion, history, and the most romantic of settings.

The Cathars, or Albigensians, were regarded in the 12th and 13th centuries as heretics – and they had the oddest of religions, derived from Zoroastrianism. They believed that the Devil had created earth which was a kind of living hell for wrongdoers. They disregarded the Old Testament, and they refused to bow down before Christ (since, if he were on earth, he could hardly be the son of God). Their priests, known as Prefects, were completely free of sin (rather as the Clears are meant to be in Scientology); they weren't allowed to eat meat or have sex. Sexuality was considered a sin, since all it did was perpetuate the ghastly human race. Indeed, according to one historian, sexuality was seen as a "diabolical trap, a horrible, repugnant snare that closes in

all living reality". (The word "bugger" is derived from the word for Bulgarian, many of whom became Cathars in the Middle Ages.) And there are connections between some of the esoteric symbols of the Cathars, and Nazism.

During the Albigensian Crusade in the 13th century, when the Roman Catholic Church waged war on the heretics in southern France, the Cathars were forced to retreat to these romantic castles; in the end, though, they were completely erased.

From the crumbling walls of Château d'Aguliar to the four châteaux at Latour, the castles remain in various states of ruin. Up in the clouds at the Château Peyrepertuse, a castle built on the very tip of a crag, surrounded by sheer rock face hundreds

of metres up, it is easy to imagine how isolated, bungy and desperate the Cathars must have felt when pursued by their enemies. There remains a curious lavatory sticking out of one end of the castle; anyone scared of heights who looked down the hole would think twice about relieving himself.

Peyrepertuse is just one of the best castles and most taxing of climbs: we saw it surrounded in mist like a London pea-souper, and I was so frightened of wandering to the edge and falling off that I remained rooted to the spot until my companion appeared out of the clouds and rescued me. The only trip to beat Peyrepertuse is Latour. Although some areas here are topped off, there are many

unguarded strips where you feel it would be all too easy to fall down into the hands of the waiting Crusaders below. Montségur is demanding, but well worth it, if you're not put off by passing the field where 450 Cathars were put to death at the stake. Four Cathars escaped from Montségur with, it's said, a mass of Christian treasure, and rumours have since abounded that identify this treasure with the Holy Grail.

If, before you go, you can read *Montségur*, written by the French historian Emile Le Roy Ladurie, which was based on Inquisition records of around 1300, you will get a much better idea of what life was like during the period. It's a bit like a medieval soap opera, and tells you who was sleeping with whom, who was guarding whose sheep, what the corrupt parish priest has to say about the yellow crosses the Cathars were forced to wear, and so on.

Montségur itself is one of the prettiest of the castles, the most easily accessible and, surprisingly, the least tourist-ridden. Standing inside its ivy-covered walls, listening to the bells of the cows below mingling with the church bells, and overlooking miles of undulating hills, you feel as though you are right back in the 13th century.

The area attracts its fair share of New Agers, since the castles are all situated around the mysterious Rennes le Château, where in the 19th century, a Father Saunière uncovered a mass of mysterious manuscripts and esoteric material, left, it's said, by the Knights of the Round Table.

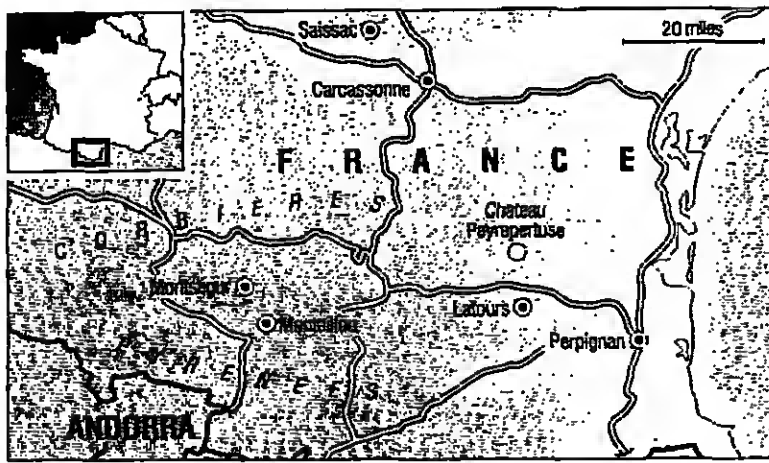
He became suddenly so incredibly rich that he was able to refurbish the church completely (unfortunately he had no taste; it's a terrible painted interior full of naïf statues), build himself a mysterious tower and formal garden, and rebuild the walls around the town. His great wealth was so inexplicable that he was excommunicated for his luxurious lifestyle. Perhaps it was he who discovered the Grail itself...

Carcassonne is a good place from which to start off, a medieval town completely restored by Viollet le Duc in the 19th century, but it's too perfect, and tourists jostle cheek by jowl as they visit shops selling scented candles, Provencal duvet-covers and overpriced pottery.

Instead, I'd advise booking at the Hotel Costes in Montségur – simple and basic, but very clean. It's one of those typical, family-run hotel-restaurants found all over France, with delicious *plats du jour*, roaring fires, two dogs, and local wine. Ideal after a long slog up to a château and back.

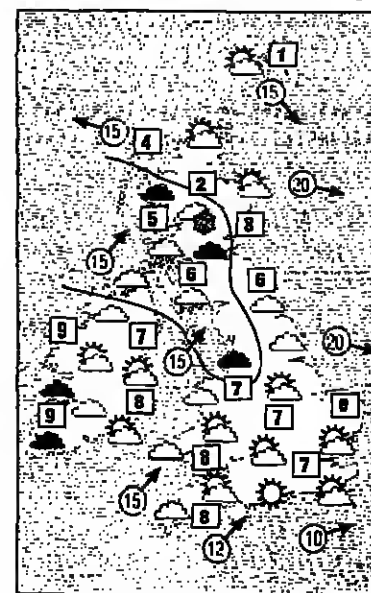
Getting there: Rail Europe (0990 300003) has a service from London Waterloo to Carcassonne via Paris and Bordeaux for £142, taking 11 hours.

Staying there: the Hotel Costes in Montségur is on 00 33 561 01 10 24. A double room costs £200 (about £24) per night. **Further information:** French Government Tourist Office, 178 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AL (0891 344123, premium rate; fax 0171-493 6594).



WEATHER

The British Isles, noon today



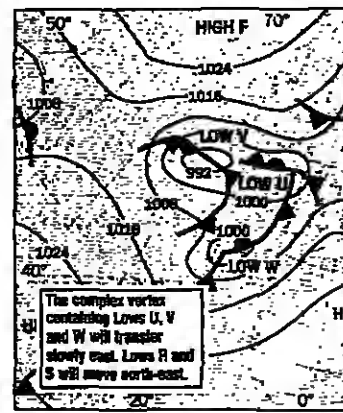
Location	Temp	Wind	Cloud
Aburdeen	4.89	Cardiff	8.46
Anglesey	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
AST	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Belfast	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Birmingham	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Blackpool	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Bournemouth	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Bristol	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45

General summary and outlook
Most of England and Wales will have a dry day with some sunny spells after early frost. However, the extreme west will be cloudier and some drizzly rain is likely to affect the north-west for a time. Northern Ireland will be rather cloudy with a little light rain and drizzle. Meanwhile, Scotland will have a cold day with the best of any sunny spells in the north and east. The south and west of the country will have duller spells and some patchy rain, sleet and hill-snow.

Tomorrow will be very unsettled across the whole of the British Isles. In Scotland outbreaks of rain, sleet and snow are likely. Initially the snow will be confined to the hills and the far north, but the rain may turn to snow in southern Scotland later. The rest of the UK will have showers and longer spells of rain. Early next week a northerly airflow will bring cold weather to the whole country with widespread night frost and some snow showers along North Sea coasts.

Location	Temp	Wind	Cloud
Aburdeen	4.89	Cardiff	8.46
Anglesey	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
AST	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Belfast	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Birmingham	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Blackpool	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Bournemouth	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Bristol	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45

Atlantic chart, noon today



Location	Temp	Wind	Cloud
Aburdeen	4.89	Cardiff	8.46
Anglesey	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
AST	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Belfast	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Birmingham	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Blackpool	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Bournemouth	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Bristol	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45

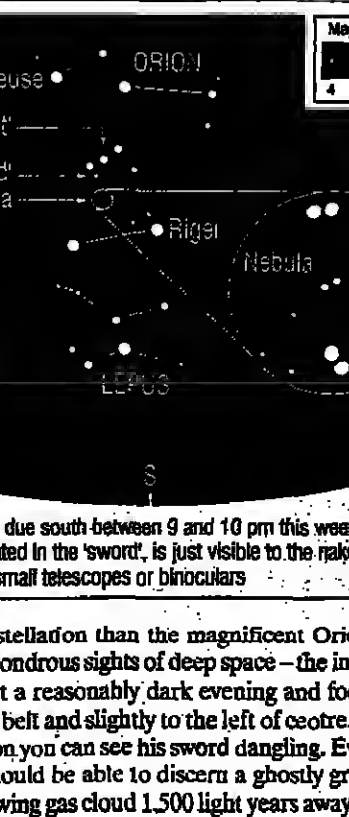
World weather

Location	Temp	Wind	Cloud
Aburdeen	4.89	Cardiff	8.46
Anglesey	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
AST	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Belfast	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Birmingham	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Blackpool	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Bournemouth	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Bristol	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45

AA Roadwatch

Location	Temp	Wind	Cloud
Aburdeen	4.89	Cardiff	8.46
Anglesey	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
AST	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Belfast	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Birmingham	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Blackpool	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Bournemouth	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Bristol	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45

The sky at night



Lighting-up times

Location	Temp	Wind	Cloud
Aburdeen	4.89	Cardiff	8.46
Anglesey	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
AST	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Belfast	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Birmingham	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Blackpool	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Bournemouth	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Bristol	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45

Air quality

Location	Temp	Wind	Cloud
Aburdeen	4.89	Cardiff	8.46
Anglesey	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
AST	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Belfast	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Birmingham	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Blackpool	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Bournemouth	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Bristol	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45

High tides

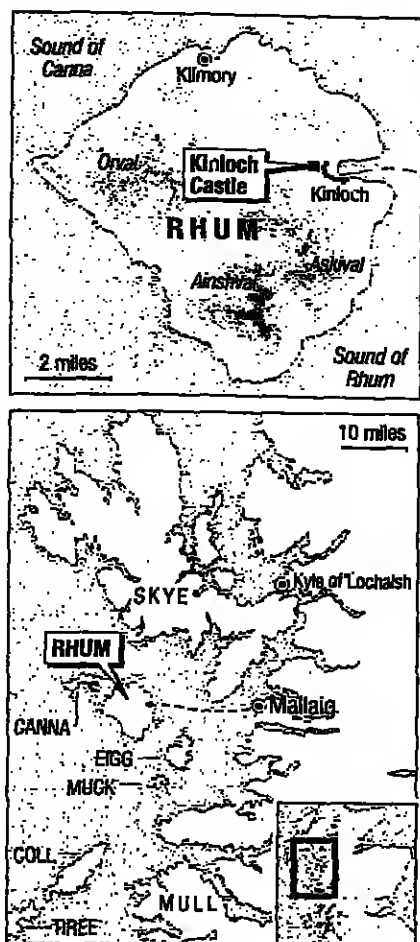
Location	Temp	Wind	Cloud
Aburdeen	4.89	Cardiff	8.46
Anglesey	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
AST	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Belfast	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Birmingham	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Blackpool	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Bournemouth	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Bristol	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45

Sun and moon

Location	Temp	Wind	Cloud
Aburdeen	4.89	Cardiff	8.46
Anglesey	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
AST	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Belfast	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Birmingham	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Blackpool	7.45	Cardiff	7.45
Bournemouth	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Bristol	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45
Cardiff	8.46	Cardiff	7.45

3/CASTLES

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 17 JANUARY 1998
■ 3



Kinloch Castle, on the island of Rhum, may well be Britain's greatest monument to self-indulgence, writes Paul Buttle. And it makes the focus of a spectacular trip.

The extravagance of Kinloch Castle still shocks, 100 years after it was built. Were it on the mainland it would be far better known. But then, the remoteness of its location off the west coast of Scotland makes the place doubly strange.

Seen from the mainland, 15 miles away, Rhum looks a striking island: a cluster of dome-like peaks seemingly afloat in the midst of the sea (an image often seen in the film *Local Hero*). Two hundred years ago the island had a population of around 400. But in the 1820s it was simply "cleared" when the residents were put aboard two ships that took them to Canada.

The island was made into a huge sheep farm, but the venture failed. Thereafter it became merely a playground for the absurdly rich, where they could spend time hunting and fishing.

Few landowners in Scotland at the turn of the century were more absurdly rich than George Bullough, who inherited the island from his father in 1891, and a huge fortune to go with it.

George's wealth had been amassed in the Lancashire cotton industry by his father and grandfather. His grandfather, something of an inventor, had founded a business manufacturing machines to serve the cotton mills; the business later expanded to America. George was one of the wealthiest men in Britain when he came into his inheritance. And whilst his father and grandfather had

devoted their lives to amassing that wealth, George devoted his life to spending it.

Part of that spending involved building Kinloch Castle. Because George wanted a red castle, the stone for it had to be cut and shipped in from the Isle of Arran.

Similarly, because the soil on the island was too poor to produce the type of luxuriant grounds he wanted to have around the castle, that, too, was shipped in: half a million tons of it, from Ayrshire. The castle was completed by 1901 and equipped with all the latest refinements then available, including central heating and electricity – a small hydroelectric plant having been built behind the castle to provide the supply. In the grounds were large greenhouses in which turtles and alligators were kept; humming birds flew in the conservatory.

In today's money it cost George all of £70m to build what was essentially a holiday home, used for just four weeks a year – he had other mansions elsewhere, as well as an ocean-going "yacht" the size of *Britannia*.

The main hall of the castle is a baronial extravaganza: a herd of stags' heads line the walls, the skin of a polar bear covers the floor a few yards from a Steinway grand piano. In the rest of the castle is a ballroom with a musicians' gallery, a dining-room with mahogany panelling, a sumptuous games room with a full-length snooker table, and a small library stocked floor to ceiling with leather-bound books.

All this, to provide a little rest and comfort after a hard day spent on the island's heather-clad hills, blasting away at the red deer. Clearly, tramping those hills did not instill in George any regard or desire for simple living.

The visits went on for 20-odd years after the castle was built, and then they stopped. George and his wife packed up their bags one summer and never returned to the castle. They left everything: the paintings, the furniture, the porcelain, the statues, the books, the cellars stocked with wine. Millions of pounds' worth of valuables they

simply abandoned to gather dust, never sending for any of it. George died in 1939 playing golf in France; his widow, Monica Lilly, died nearly 30 years later, in 1967.

Eleven years before Monica Lilly died, she offered the castle and the island to the Queen, who politely refused it. A year later she sold the island and everything on it, including the castle and all its contents, to Scottish Natural Heritage, for the knock-down price of £1 an acre – a total of £27,000.

Although George and Monica Lilly never stayed in the castle again, they made one final visit to Rhum: and they are still there. On the far south side of the island from the castle is one of the strangest burial sites in Britain: a mausoleum in the shape of a Greek temple, standing in gaunt isolation, looking out over the Atlantic. It was built for George's father, and now George rests on one side of him and his wife on the other.

Close by the mausoleum are the ruined remains of several former island homes – last occupied more than 170 years ago.

Similar ruins can be seen in the north of the island, at Kilmory.

I found Kilmory an entrancing place. Looking north across a sweeping sandy beach, you can see the Cuillin mountains of Skye, and to the south are the majestic peaks of Rhum itself. A herd of stags grazing on the short sward added an almost surreal atmosphere on the day I was there. Normally these animals take flight as soon as they see a human being, but here they have become almost domesticated.

In the midst of the herd was a small cottage. It had a affecting simplicity, especially surrounded by all that natural beauty, and looked a near ideal place to live. I wondered why it was that George Bullough never thought the same, but instead spent all those millions, building what in essence is and always has been, despite all that expenditure, a ludicrously ugly edifice.

The museum section of Kinloch Castle is open from April to October, though tours outside

these dates are sometimes possible. For information on the castle and the rest of the island, contact Rhum National Nature Reserve, the Reserve Office, The White House, Isle of Rhum, Inverness-shire PH43 4RR (01687 462026).

Getting there: short of hiring a helicopter, the only transport to Rhum for most of the year is on a Caledonian MacBrayne ferry from Mull (01475 650100). The MV 'Lochnagar' takes between 90 minutes and four hours, depending on the routing. She operates three or four days a week throughout the year. The fare for a five-day return is £9.35 for foot passengers. In summer, the timetable on Wednesdays and Saturdays allows for day visits to be made; at other times, you have to stay overnight.

Accommodation: the Reserve Office (01687 462026) can arrange places to stay around the island. You can also stay in a self-catering hostel at Kinloch Castle (call the manager on 01687 462037). The attached restaurant is open during the summer.

Rhum legacy of a wealthy egoist

Monumental extravagance: the stone for Kinloch Castle was cut and shipped in from the Isle of Arran, the soil for the grounds was transported from Ayrshire

Photograph: Sue Anderson



SIMON CALDER

The best argument yet for a single European currency has just dropped through my letterbox. You expect your first credit card statement after Christmas to contain a shock or two, but you don't usually expect the culprit to be the credit card company itself.

Here's how it happened. The usual check-out scam surrounded the cashier's desk at the Hotel Alcora in Seville. I said the bill had already been paid; they said it hadn't, and with the disadvantage conferred upon anyone with a plane to catch I handed over my credit card to settle the 25,000-peseta account.

Seconds later the mistake was spotted. My card was put through the machine again, a refund slip was issued for the same amount – in pesetas – and I thought no more about it. Until the bill arrived this week. The amount charged was £106, but the refund was only £100.

Losing £6 in as many seconds is worrying; more alarming is what it suggests about the margins the bank appropriates for foreign transactions.

In the seven years since the collapse of Communism, the countries of the former Soviet Union have adopted all

manner of Western habits, including airlines which focus on the interest of the passengers, not the staff. But they haven't quite grasped the concept that in-flight magazines should be bland and unadventurous.

Uzbekistan Airways' cabin reading, imaginatively entitled *Inflight Magazine*, takes its chances with a feature on Britain's capital.

It commends the "Free typical walking excursions through London", a surprise to the London Walks organisation, which charges £4.50 a stroll.

"An excursion of London will include Big Ben, the clock tower that collates the

exact time throughout Great Britain."

Panorama, the in-flight organ of Ukraine International Airways, focuses on home territory. The first time that British travellers are likely to see this is when heading to the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, probably for work. So any anxiety they may feel will be amplified by the full-page advertisement that begins: "I was getting really nervous. I couldn't believe it when my company transferred me to Ukraine."

The ad, for an American-run clinic in the capital, continues the worrying theme: "As the day

approached, I was starting to panic ... Oh my gosh! What if I get sick over there or worse ... in some kind of horrible accident ... I had heard some nightmare stories about Ukrainian health care."

I think I preferred the blunt technical data that passed as in-flight reading on a flight from Irkutsk to Moscow. Just after the Tupolev took off for its non-stop flight, I read that the aircraft's maximum range was 5,000km.

The distance between the two cities is 5,200km.

What airline is this, anyway? That's the question

posed by Peter Copping of Manchester, who bought a package holiday from a small tour operator. "I travelled out on the ticket of one 'airline', on a plane operated by another carrier. The journey back was on a different, non-UK airline.

None of these was the airline whose name appeared on my ticket. Had an accident occurred – I don't mean a crash, just, say, boiling coffee being spilled on me – I would not have known who was responsible."

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4/SKIING

Le weekend break: the chain reactions

It seemed a good idea to whiz across to the Alps for a three-day ski break. But have you ever tried to drive up a mountainside in the snow? Without snow chains? Not a wise move, as Richard Holledge discovered.

There is one, foolproof way to find out whether it is going to snow in the Alps. Not the cloud lowering over Mont Blanc, not the pine cones opening (or is it closing?), not even the advice of some gnarled, alpine Ian MacCaskill. You wait until you hear I am hiring a car for the short - huh - haul from Geneva to a nearby resort.

Snowstorms are guaranteed. One trip saw me and Ford Orion slide off the mountain in gentle spring snowfall below Val Thorens. There was the slow-motion skid into the crash barrier on the way up to Alpe d'Huez; the traumatic battle against blizzards on the way to Tignes; and as for "road blocked with snow" above Selva ... So it was that at midnight a week or so ago, as late-night revellers sat cozily in bars toasting a mighty snowfall, I was fighting a losing battle with snow chains just outside Chamonix.

The idea had been to prove to myself how easy it is to fit across to the slopes for three days without the help of travel agent or specialist organiser.

It started well. However, it is an ineluctable fact of travel life that the bits of the trip that work are equalled by those that don't. The journey from Luton to Geneva with easyJet took off on time and arrived early. The £128 fare compared

more than favourably with the £408 quoted by British Airways, even if you did have to buy your own can of Stella and packet of Twiglets.

The flight took one hour 20 minutes, the baggage took 50 minutes to clear, the business of hiring the car took an hour and 10 minutes, the getting out of Geneva another hour. Nice place, Geneva, but not late at night in the rain, when all roads lead to centre ville and not autres directions. (Next time I'll cough up the £16 necessary to travel on the two miles of Swiss motorway link from the airport to France's Autoroute Blanche, and bypass the place altogether.)

If it's raining in Geneva it's snowing in the mountains. And foggy. So by the time I reached Chamonix, at around midnight, the snow was piling down so fast that it was obvious I would not make the last few miles to my destination, Argentière, that night.

Of course, being an experienced driver-off of mountains I had been remarkably perceptive, and had persuaded the harassed girl on the Avis desk to sell me snow chains. Frankly, even as I did so I knew that I would never manage to put them on. So it was that I was parked in bin of snow in a gale on a busy main road with cars either contemptuously rushing past spraying me with snow (chains on, smug bastards), or wobbling dangerously (no chains, stupid bastards).

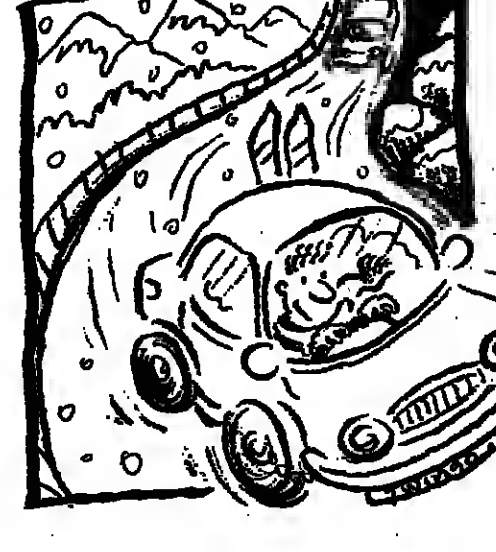
The idea is that you slip the chains over and round the car tyres, simply click the hooks inside the tyre into place, and join up the outside links - all with a minimum of effort. However, it doesn't work like that. You need the muscles of a weightlifter and the agility of a contortionist in the Cirque du Soleil.

SKI TIP

To improve your ability to balance on steeper slopes, ski with your hands below your hips and in front of your thighs. This will allow you to turn your legs more powerfully and to absorb bumps and difficult terrain.

Chris Exall

Snowchains...



I thought that if I lay down in the road and looked tragic - maybe even dead - perhaps somebody would realise that this was a pathetic Englishman and would come to my rescue.

I tried losing my temper a few times. Just an act, of course.

Back to Chamonix, where the concierge at one hotel smiled sympathetically, if rather sardonically, and told me there was only one bed left in the whole town. Spurred by my reluctance to spend a night in my otherwise very cosy Renault Twingo, I tore through the town, sidestepped a coachload of bewildered Asians and found myself in that very haven.

No food of course, just the left-over Christmas cake I had thoughtfully bought for my would-be companions of the piste.

Next day, more snow, but this time, with daylight and under cover of the garage, I easily put on my chains - a mere 45 minutes of grunting, straining and cursing, and I was off.

How fabulous to have a car. Go where you like, move effortlessly from one resort to another, ignore other English cars struggling to put on their chains by the roadside. Freedom.

The sun came out, shining through snow-laden trees, the Chamonix valley looked lovely, the mountains looked inviting.

And so they were; the big, unplisted runs above Argentière rimmed by mighty peaks, the easier, prettier runs of Les Houches packed with happy skiers. Lunch, lots of it, was taken outside. Sunbathing in Decem-

ber? Of course. Three days of perfect skiing, a meal to restore your faith in French cooking at the Chamonix Auberge du Bois Prin - all foie gras, fish and lamb in glorious harmony - and it was back to Geneva.

A weekend away. Perfect.

Except that I haven't forgotten that first night.

Next time I'll think about going by train. For example, you can get to the resorts of the Trois Vallées - Courchevel, Méribel, Les Menuires - on one of three or four trains a day from Geneva via Chambéry and Moutiers, and catch a bus or taxi to the resort. La Plagne, Les Arcs and Val d'Isère are reachable from stations further on down the line.

Better still, take the train direct from

Geneva airport to the Swiss resorts of the Portes du Soleil. Take the train to Aigle, walk across the platform, take the téléphérique, not just to the charming village of Champéry, but to the cable car which connects to the dozen resorts and 200 kilometres of skiing that make up the Portes du Soleil.

Quite a handy place to have a car, as it happens. Maybe I'll go to evening classes in snow-chain assembly.

Le weekend: easyJet fare: £128 (£79 out, £49 return).

The car hire: £124 for three days. Snow chains, £20. Unscheduled stay in Park Hotel, Chamonix, £40.

Contacts: French Railways (0990 300003), Swiss Railways (0171 734 1921).

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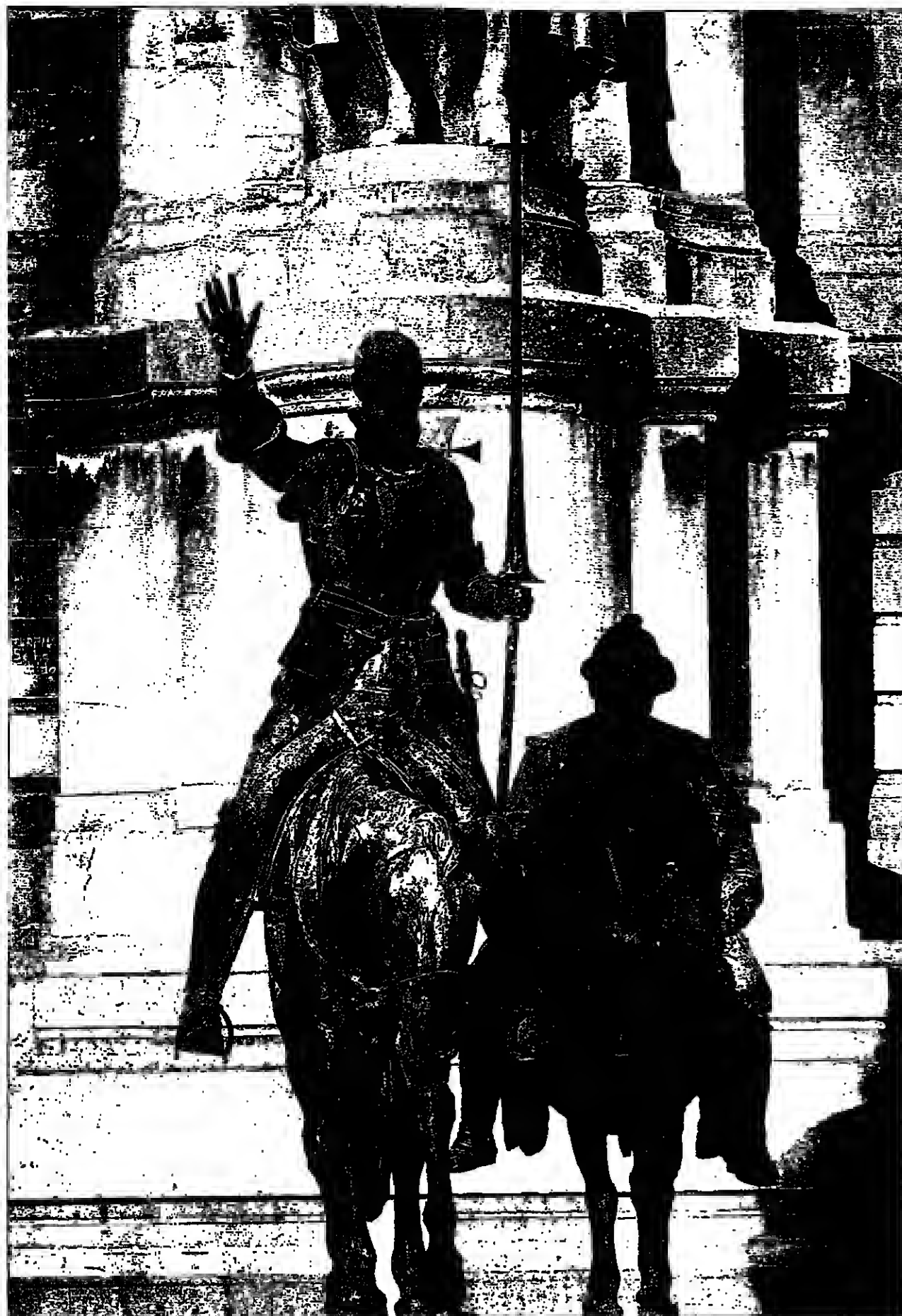
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48 hours in the life of Madrid

For a short cut to the soul of the city, Liz Nash offers a guide.

Why go now?

Because the young Madrileños who infect the city with their vibrant energy are back from their New Year skiing breaks and extended family reunions. eager to go out and have fun. And the tourist invasion that immobilises streets, bars and museums won't kick in till Easter: the winter sun spears through your eyelids into your heart, you get 240 pesetas to the pound – and the sales are on.

Beam down

British Airways (0345 222111) and Iberia (0171-830 1711) have been engaged in a low-attrition fares war on the London-Madrid run for several years. Fares are currently around £120. You may be able to find lower prices from Luton on Debonair (0500 146200). From other parts of the UK, the best deals may be with KLM via Amsterdam – through discount agents for around £125.

Get your bearings

The airport bus leaves every 15 minutes and takes 45 minutes to get to the central Plaza Colon. The underground bus terminal connects with the tube, where you can ask for a public transport map.

Check in

Book ahead at the Monaco (522 4630), a former brothel, famed for its opulent bedrooms and easy-going decadence, in the lively gay quarter, Chueca. More mainstream is the Suecia (531 6900), amazingly quiet for such a central spot. The five-star Palace (429 1302), opposite the Parliament, dazzles with belle-époque glory after months of being shrouded in scaffolding. Expensive, at up to £200 a head, but unmissable if only for a drink in the chandelied lounge. The warm-hearted Pension La Coruña (429 2543), a snip at £10 per head, has beautiful views over the Retiro park.

Take a ride

Madrid has few architectural gems and traffic is impossible, so forget the coach tour and take the Teleférico, or cable car, from the Parque del Oeste. Soar over the city and watch trees, the motorway ring road and the feeble Manzanares river fall away beneath you until you arrive in the sprawling Casa de Campo park. Clock the stunning city skyline and after a swift turn about the scrubby Casa de Campo – a wretched, creepy place in my opinion – take a return ride. Off season you're likely to get a cabin to yourself, so if the company is right, have a 10-minute cuddle suspended in that magnificent sky.

Take a hike

... down the Gran Via, once Europe's sassiest boulevard and still the throbbing artery of the city. Start at the Plaza de España, ringed by pompous Forties sky-

scrapers and redeemed by an engaging monument to Cervantes with a bronze statue of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza at his feet. Stride past glitzy Art Deco movie palaces with their vast, hand-painted film posters; negotiate street vendors, lottery sellers, kids scoffing roast chestnuts; dive into doll shops and bookshops; pass the Telefonica building where journoes filed – and were censored – in the Civil War; and proceed to the posh end, dominated by fin-de-siècle buildings, including the newly restored Metropolis (1905), and the Circulo de Bellas Artes. Make for the Cibeles fountain, emblem of the city, invaded by football fans when Real Madrid win. Opposite is the Central Post Office, whose wedding-cake grandeur evokes an era when Spain had an empire to run, by mail.

Lunch on the run

Spaniards like to lunch long and late. But for a brisk midday chop-and-go, try La Toscana (Ventura de la Vega 22) in the heart of bar territory between Plaza Ana and Sol. Get there early (ie before 2pm) and you may be seated without having to queue. Specialities are the tomato, tuna and onion salad, and roast veal and chips swimming in luscious meat juice. Non-meat-eaters enjoy deep-fried squid, or scrambled egg with mushrooms and little eels. With frothy beer on tap, or a jug of house red, it is difficult to pay more than £10 a head.

Cultural afternoon

Don't miss the Prado which, even amid disruptive renovations, still offers the finest collection of Goya, Velazquez and El Greco you are ever likely to see. The newly opened top floor contains a rotunda in semi-darkness with a fine collection of Goya drawings illustrating witchcraft, ignorance and superstition. Being fragile, they are on show for only a few months each year. Across the road is Rafael Moneo's Thyssen Bornemisza museum, jammed with dazzling stuff, particularly 19th-century European and 20th-century American art. Canova's masterpiece *The Three Graces*, on loan from the V&A, is on show in the foyer until 22 February.

Window shopping

Shoes are the thing: cheap, elegant and everywhere. Luruna, Serrano 54, just by Marks & Spencer, is loafer heaven. For clothes, try any branch of the fashion chain Zara, which knocks off the hottest designs in the blink of an eye at half the price of Britain's high-street equivalents. Vinçon, a cutting-edge Barcelona emporium of every designer object you can imagine, has opened in a matt black, laid-back warehouse in Castello 18.

An aperitif

This is Spain's favourite art form, celebrated with enthusiastic fervour between 12 noon and 2pm and between 7pm and 9pm. Try the raucous and kitsch

Torre del Oro, a gash of Andalusia on the Plaza Mayor, for a chilled fine and coffee-cup-sized *tapa* of paella. Or, if gory bullfight videos are not to your taste, head for Chicote, the city's smartest cocktail bar, at Gran Via 12. This is an austere haven of steel and leather Art Deco curves, unchanged since the Thirties. Occupy one of the side benches, sip the best *mojito* in town and savour the hush.

Dining late

Madrid may be 300km from the sea but it has the best and freshest fish in Spain, possibly Europe. And the restaurant for unadorned fishy delight is La Trainera (Lagasca 60), run since the Fifties by cheery Miguel Garcia, whose grandfather used to bring fish to the capital in his ice-covered donkey cart. The warren of little rooms with wooden benches and tables gives a casual 'ahoy lads' feel to a classy operation.

Sunday morning: go to church

Madrid's churches are mostly heavy, depressing places but an exception is El Basilico de San Miguel, just off the Plaza de Cordon, a sweet, rococo confection built during the rule of the Habsburgs that could have been plucked from a side street of old Vienna. Creamy cherubs and gilded carvings make you smile, and the surrounding cobbled hilly lanes show a gentler side to this roaring city.

Bracing brunch

Squeeze in sideways to Diaz y Larrouy, Cava Baja 6, a Basque delicatessen and bar that serves sturdy rioja wine in squat tumblers, and a fierce, sloppy cheese called *torta de casu* with wedges of good, salty bread. Spicy chorizo sausage and smoked salmon canapés will set you up for the day – or at least until siesta-time. By Sunday lunch time bargain-hunters pile in from the nearby Rastro street market.

A walk in the park

The Retiro, once the monarchs' private garden, is a vast, leafy space in the heart of the city. It's a hit nippy just now for a boatride on the lake, or to linger with the fortune tellers, the buskers or the open-air chess enthusiasts, so tramp on and admire the statues, the rose garden and the lovely trees.

Icing on the cake

The coolest souvenir is an oilcloth tablecloth of a post-Franco map of Spain with its 17 autonomous regions clearly delineated. Available from Galian, an orthopaedic and exercise goods supplier on Carretas 31. Don't hang about, though: this is a well-known prostitutes' corner. Before taking the airport bus for your flight home, have a coffee in Gijon, Paseo de Recoletos 21, a traditional marble-and-mahogany coffee-house, where elderly geos still hold forth in their discussions or *tertulias*, as they did a century ago.

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At the feet of the master: beneath the memorial to Miguel de Cervantes in the Plaza de España, is an equestrian statue of his most famous creations – Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Photograph: Pictures Colour Library Ltd

COMPETITION WINNERS

We've been having fun all winter long, checking the answers to our New Year competition. The questions were all related to the Beach Boys, and many of you achieved excellent scores – aided by the festive wild card, which allowed one answer to be "God Only Knows".

The tie-break was to nominate the best beach that the Boys never broached. The suggestions girdled the globe: here are the finalists.

Great Yarmouth Pleasure Beach: "where Norfolk Broads make fast to their Buoy at night" – Steven Brown, Beckenham, Kent

Leigh-on-Sea, Essex: "Tide's out, mud's up, surfing here won't be especially entertaining" – Ralph Conroy, Leigh-on-Sea

Manchester, Massachusetts: "The 'singing beach' (it does exist, honest),

which the Boys never broached as Brian Wilson couldn't stand competition from Manchester as well as Liverpool" – N D Michaelson, Knebworth, Hertfordshire

Copacabana, Lake Titicaca, Bolivia: "Scarcely a wave or person, cold beer in pale sun by old carousel" – L Hamilton, London

Brighton, East Sussex: "They wanted to catch a wave, not a cold" – Michael Langham, London

All these people receive copies of Lonely Planet's US Phrasebook. The second prize, of a neat pair of eye shades, goes to L Hamilton's lyrical suggestion; and this year's overall champion, winning an inflatable beach bed, is Michael Langham for his suggestion of Brighton.

Thank you all for entering – and watch this space in December for our next geographical quiz.

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Get away from it all...



Miss World on wheels

You don't have to be a motoring enthusiast to enjoy the museum at Beaulieu. Emma Houghton and her family were unexpectedly captivated.

Whatever misgivings you may have about the impact of the internal combustion engine, Beaulieu's Motor Museum is undeniably fascinating. Crammed with more than 250 classic cars and motorcycles, it's like Miss World for four wheels. The bulky Daimler 1899 12HP, the majestic, brass-and-green Bugatti 1910 Type 13, the elegant Bluebird land speed record breaker: these are the starlets of motoring, their glamorous bodywork gleaming with a shine you could powder your nose by.

But Beaulieu is not just a load of old cars. There are informative displays on every imaginable aspect of motoring - from road design to spark plugs - while a science section allows hands-on exploration of the basic principles of cars and their engines. You can also explore an old red London bus, while watching a video of its history. But topping the bill is the Wheels exhibition, a multimedia extravaganza bringing alive 100 years of motoring history. Seated in your little carriage, you're twirled around corridors of displays and blasted with the sounds and smells of yesteryear.

Beyond the museum, kids can get a taste of life in the fast lane on the Fast Trax virtual racing games, or enjoy a spin through the motor racing history in the simulator. You can also take a vertiginous ride on the monorail through the roof of the motor museum and on to Palace House and its gardens. Seat of the Montague since 1538, this stately home is packed with family portraits and other mementos, and was once

the gatehouse to the adjoining 13th-century abbey, where you can now explore the daily life of Cistercian monks in its ruins.

The visitors
Emma Houghton, a freelance writer, went with her husband, Jonathan Rees, and their three boys, Joshua, seven, Flan, five, and Zachary, two.

Joshua: I loved the virtual racing because I like playing computer games, especially with steering-wheels. I liked the simulator, too: at first it pretended you were in an old motor car, and then you went in faster and faster ones until in the end it crashed. It was cool.

In the museum there was a science bit where you try things out about cars and how they work, which was really interesting.

I liked the monorail, the secret stairs in Palace House and the Wheels exhibition. There was a model prehistoric man who looked like a friend of ours called Neil. I particularly liked the bit where it was all 3D, and the hoverscans on the little motorway. All the staff were very friendly and when we were sitting on this old bus a man came in and gave us all a free pen. I'd really like to go back and do everything again.

Flan: There were lots of cars in the museum, some with dummies in. They look real but they're only plastic people. I liked

the simulator car when it was going into the jungle and it felt really bumpy. The monorail was quite scary when you were going, because it was so high off the ground and wobbled a bit.

I loved all the bits of the Wheels. You get into a little train and this bar comes down on your lap and you go round the track and see loads of things about cars. We went round twice because we liked it so much.

Jonathan: I really thought Beaulieu wouldn't be for me, because as far as I'm concerned a car is just something that takes you from A to B - if you're lucky. In fact I found it all completely fascinating - I could

happily have spent a week there. Walking around the museum, you realise just how much cars are part of everyone's heritage. You see so many things you remember from your past - buses, signposts, old Corgi model cars. I was a bit disappointed to see there wasn't a hall of shame for our old heige Allegro, though.

All the hands-on stuff about how cars work was brilliant, but best of all was the Wheels. That was absolutely fantastic. Each little section was obviously a real labour of love, and more than that, it was all done with humour and affection. The whole thing, Palace House included, was great, but what really made it for me was the motor museum.

'They look real but they're only plastic people.' Flan Rees was intrigued by the life-like models at Beaulieu's Motor Museum

Photograph: Brian Harris

Emma: I don't have a good relationship with cars. I resent being dependent on them, and am so utterly indifferent to what I drive that I can barely tell a Mini from a Mercedes. Even so, I was captivated by the sheer beauty of these old classics.

I was really impressed with the comprehensive attention to detail. Such pains had been taken to recreate all the antique household sundries in an old delivery van, for instance, and the tools and spares in the reproduction of an old garage and workshop. But perhaps the best aspect of my day was Beaulieu's staff. Reg, the principal car cleaner, reassured us that the cars were taken out for regular frolics, and he even told us the secret of their enviable shine (elbow grease). Without exception everyone we came into contact with went out of their way to be friendly and polite. It was such a refreshing change this side of the Atlantic.

The deal
Getting there: the Beaulieu Motor Museum (01590 612123) is in the New Forest between Southampton and Bournemouth, just off B3056. The nearest railway station is Brockenhurst, a short taxi ride away.

Opening times: daily, 10am-5pm; Easter to September, until 6pm. Closed Christmas Day. Some features, such as the simulator and Fast Trax virtual reality games, must be paid for separately.

Admission: adult £8.50, four to 16 years, £6; family ticket, for two adults and four children, £28.

Access: there is full wheelchair access to the motor museum, restaurant and ground floor of Palace House.

Facilities: the Brabazon food court and bars offer a good range of food and drink at reasonable prices. You can also picnic in the grounds.

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Plug in for spring

Convenience gardening sacrifices adventure for instant results, but in midwinter that can be reassuring. Here is a range of young, ready-grown plants to order now for the growing season.

The latest edition of *The Seed Search* tells you where you can buy seed of 40,000 different plants. Just stop and think about that number. Put it in context by remembering that the whole of the native flora of Britain only amounts to about 2,000 plants. Amidst all the doom and gloom about flowers disappearing, forests burning, wild bulbs shrivelling in the hands of rapacious dealers, it is remarkable that any of us, if we wanted, could pick up the phone and order the means of growing such a vast variety of living things.

But we don't. Lists of the 10 best-selling varieties of flower seeds change remarkably little from year to year. Lobelia, dwarf impatiens, godetia, sweet peas, nasturtium, petunia, night-scented stocks, begonia, geranium and pansy were the favourites five years ago. Godetia, stocks, dwarf impatiens, aubrieta, geranium, lobelia, nasturtium 'Jewel Mixed', sweet pea, nasturtium 'Alaska Mixed' and sunflowers are the seed merchant Suttons' current best-sellers. Only the newly fashionable sunflower speaks of any real shift in taste.

It's because we are so predictable as gardeners that seed companies were able to switch smoothly a few years ago into offering us baby plants as a - more expensive - alternative to seed. You could buy a packet of seed of the new creamy-coloured petunia 'Banana Milkshake' from Mr Fothergill for £2.15. Two dozen "plugs" of the same variety cost three times as much, but this is still cheaper than buying 24 full-grown petunias at planting-out time in May.

Plugs represent a slightly more certain vision of the future than a seed packet does. Petunias are not easy to raise from seed if you work, as I do, with a combination of windowills, airing cupboards and spare bedrooms, rather than with a professional greenhouse and a state-of-the-art propagator. The seed is very fine and germinates best at a temperature of 65-70°F. Because it's so fine, it is best left uncovered on the surface of the compost, but the seedlings then need a little fine compost sifted over them as they begin to grow. All this is fiddly. Then just when you thought you'd got them

over the worst hurdles, the seedlings have a disastrous tendency to damp off - a kind of horticultural hara-kiri.

The petunia is one of the few flowers that has dropped from the best-selling list of seeds in the last five years because people now choose to grow them from plugs or buy them as fully grown plants. There are masses on offer - more than 30 different varieties in Mr Fothergill's Young Plant catalogue alone.

The whole point of such catalogues is to make us lose reason, but after a summer when many petunias melted to a slimy mush in the rain, phrases such as "weather resistant" have a point. 'Fantasy Mixed', an F1 hybrid, has smallish flowers, but there are lots of them and they weather well. Mr Fothergill's sells 24 plugs for £6.45.

I could live without petunias, but I'd hate to be without lobelias, which are also fiddly

does ageratum, if we are talking plant rights. Ageratum by nature is a tallish (18-20in), loose-headed beauty. 'Blue Bouquet' (Chiltern Seeds, 95p) gives an idea of what it could do, if only breeders wouldn't turn it into a squash-faced, congested, dumpy little plant, with flowers that ball up in the rain. Ageratum blue is a particularly good colour, slightly slaty, hazy, lovely with a sharp, acid-droppy yellow, or with purple. But if you want plugs, dumplings is all you can get: 'Blue Haze', 8in high, from Suttons (£9.25 for 100 seedlings or £7.95 for 40 casplants) or 'Blue Mist', 6in high, from Dobies (£9.25 for 100 seedlings, or £7.95 for 40 casplants).

Most firms offer plants in five different sizes, from seedlings to jumbo plugs. The bigger they are of course, the more per plant you pay, but a jumbo plug leaves little room for error on the part of the gardener, as they can be planted out so quickly.

When they arrive (they are usually sent by first-class mail), I plant out all plugs and seedlings, whatever size, in individual 3-in plant pots. This is expensive in compost, but the plants grow vigorously and their roots are disturbed very little when they are planted out. If you set seedlings or miniplugs together in seed trays, the roots tangle with each other and so the plants get a shock when you prise them apart before planting them out. In these dark, gale-blowing days, that's what I'm dreaming of: planting, planting, planting. Roll on spring.

'The Seed Search', compiled and edited by Karen Platt, is available (£10.99 + £1.75 p&p) direct from Karen Platt at 35 Longfield Rd, Crookes, Sheffield S10 1QW. The 'Young Plant Catalogue' is available from Mr Fothergill's, Kentford, Suffolk CB8 7QH (01638 552512). Order all Mr Fothergill's young plants by 20 March. Speed plugs from Thompson & Morgan, Poplar Lane, Ipswich, Suffolk IP8 3BU (01473 688321) need to be ordered by 15 March. Young plants can be ordered up to 15 April. Last orders for most of Dobies's petunias must be in by 11 March; for ageratum 'Blue Mist' by 4 Feb. Order a catalogue from Brownhill Way, Torquay, Devon TQ2 7QW (01803 616888). Suttons' young plants are listed in their seed catalogue, from Hele Rd, Torquay, Devon TQ2 7QJ (01803 614455). Order ageratum 'Blue Haze' by 5 Feb, lobelia 'White Lady' by 19 Feb. Plugs are available in a range of other annuals, including asters, antirrhinum, begonia, brachycome, gazania, helichrysum, geranium, impatiens, marigold and nicotiana.

ANNA PAVORD

to raise from seed, but excellent and easy from plugs. "Hackneyed," said a friend dismissively, when I put them near the top of my own list of favourite annuals. "Non-sense," I replied. It's not their fault they are so often lined out like morse code, blue dots between dashes of white alyssum. The plants themselves are enchanting. A little while ago, some self-seeded from a tub in our garden into the cracks of the paving stones below, I liked the effect so much that now I plant them in cracks deliberately.

I also plant them between low patches of dianthus, to fill up the ground where the spring-flowering tulips are slowly settling in. The tulips are the most important plants there, and I don't ever want the summer display to crowd the bulbs out. Lobelia understands that. Mr Fothergill's has the bronze-leaved dark blue 'Crystal Palace' (24 plugs for £5.95) and 'Regatta Blue Splash', which I grew last year from seed. It's a trailing type, the white flowers splashed and stained with pale blue.

'White Lady' is a pretty little bushy white-flowered lobelia (£8.95 for 110 miniplugs or £7.95 for 40 casplants, from Suttons). Don't follow their serving suggestion - this white lobelia planted alternately with blue ageratum. Lobelia deserves better. So



Bestseller: petunia surfina 'Pink vein'

Photograph: Friedrich Strauss/GPI

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CUTTINGS

The trouble with Agnes

Next Saturday the Kew guide Eric Taylor will lead a Cooks Tour round the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, highlighting the unusual food plants that flourish in Kew's hothouses. Bananas, coffee beans, tea plants and Caribbean star fruit all grow in the Palm House. Kew could also supply the highly nutritious durian fruit, native to Malaysia and Indonesia - if anybody ever wanted it. Usually they don't, because it smells so terrible. Saturday's tour leaves from the Victoria Gate visitor centre at 11.30am and will be repeated on Wednesday 25 February. For details of other themed tours, contact Kew on 0181 332 5633.

A little while ago I wrote about the 'Agnes' rose in our garden, which had had 15 years to get its act together and had failed miserably. I never saw a single one of its big, double, amber-yellow flowers, and finally dispatched the hush to the bonfire. Lavena Hawes has the same problem. "My courtyard garden in central Cambridge is packed with plants," she writes. "I have about 15 different roses, including the rugosa rose 'Agnes'. She was planted in 1986 in memory of my mother, next to 'Mme Isaac Pereire' and 'Alfred de Dalmas'. They flowered with gay abandon again this summer but 'Agnes' has only ever had one bloom in the whole of her life.

This year she had three buds, but they just turned brown and dropped off. So do I follow your example and give her a quiet burial? I haven't any room to plant her elsewhere." Space in a small garden is too precious to

waste on no-hopers. My answer is an unequivocal "Yes".

Weekend breaks for gardeners are on offer at The Swan Hotel, Southwold, Suffolk, well within reach of some of the area's finest gardens. During the weekend you can visit Mark Rumary's fine garden at Yoxford, a garden designed by Lanning Roper at Orford, and Lord and Lady Tollemache's acres at Helmingham Hall. There will also be a champagne welcome at Michael Loftus's excellent nursery, Woottons of Wenham. For full details of this and other gardening breaks in July and September, contact Dudley Clarke at The Swan (01502 722186).

Visiting gardens in France has never been easier, thanks to the Channel Tunnel. Within hours you could be wandering beside the newly planted ponds of the Manoir de Pontgirard, admiring the strictly regulated design of Mme Wirth's garden at Château de Brécy, swooning over the swaths of colour planted by Mme de Carpentier in the walled gardens at Château de Canon and checking out the fruit at the Jardins des Plantes in Rouen. Details of these and other Normandy gardens are available from the Normandy Tourist Board, The Old Bakery, Bath Hill, Keynsham, Bristol BS18 1HG (01179 860386).

Agriframes made its name with metal arches, trellises, pergolas, bowers and fruit cages for gardeners, but its mail-order catalogue wanders much deeper into gardening territory. It offers tool lockers and tip bags,

boots and bamboo screens. Agriframes also sells spun polypropylene fleece, warm, permeable and translucent. Use it to protect the heads of bay trees or tree ferns during winter. Or set it over young seedlings to protect them from attack. A roll of fleece 40ft x 5ft costs £10.25. For a copy of the mail-order catalogue, contact Agriframes at Charlwoods Rd, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 2HG (01342 310000).

Marceline Siddons set up The Conservatory shortly after she had finished her botany degree at Cambridge. She wanted to supply not just conservatory plants, but also the right kind of advice on how best to grow them. So if a plant is a martyr to red spider, she doesn't hide the fact. But if she thinks it is worth growing anyway, she'll tell you that as well. The most recent catalogue produced by Ms Siddons and her husband, Chris, lists nine different kinds of abutilon and five acacias. She also has mauandya, which I grew on the south front of the house this summer. Too much leaf to flower was my verdict; however, that might change if the plant were grown in a conservatory, and kept dryer and hungrier. For enthusiasts, there are 13 different kinds of citrus and 15 bougainvilleas. The Conservatory at Gornshall Gallery, Gornshall, Surrey GU5 9LB (01483 203019) is open Mon-Sat 10am-5.30pm and Sunday afternoons from April to the end of September. Plants can also be sent by mail order.

Anna Pavord

Motorised mud-wrestling

You need high mud tolerance, a willingness to spend all day in second gear, and an ability to obey three rules. Eric Kendall goes four-wheel driving.

Speed is exactly what off-road driving is not about. "If you think you can take your brain out and put the boot in, you should try humper cars," was the gist of the briefing session, during which I learnt the three rules: 1) always keep your thumbs in a "thumbs up" position while grasping the steering wheel; 2) don't touch the foot pedals unless specifically told to do so; 3) don't stick your arm out to brace yourself if the vehicle rolls.

And you probably thought the ability to drive a car was going to be an advantage. The rules make sense when you start to appreciate what you're in for: gripping thumbs can get broken by the spokes of the spinning steering-wheel as it kicks; indiscriminate use of the accelerator, brake and, most of all, clutch pedal can have unusual effects away from Tarmac; and, finally, the roll cage and harnesses are there to stop you being crushed or falling out - any limb that is sticking out will snap off in a similar but more serious way than the thumbs in rule one.

The only problem is that, like the rules, most of the practice of four-wheel-driving is counter-intuitive to anyone acquainted with driving on the road. Some of the mechanical differences are obvious: power is supplied to four rather than two wheels, and the tyres are big and chunky.

But the hidden differences, such as the long engine stroke and hefty flywheel, mean that it's practically impossible to stall the engine. Once in gear, that's where you leave it. You certainly shouldn't slip the clutch, even as you slow to a halt; with the drum brakes full of water most of the time, the engine serves both for going and for stopping.

It's astonishing, and a mighty relief, the first time you try "first gear, no brakes" down a small cliff. It was only at the end of the day that I realised I hadn't once used the foot-brake going downhill - not even a dab. And these are the inclines that would make Franz Klammer's hair curl.

But you've got to get up there first. Mud, trees, troughs as deep as the vehicle, rocks and pools of water, are all connected on the steep hillside by a track of sorts.

Just powering all four wheels to provide traction isn't the whole story. A mixture of driving techniques is essential: exploiting the weight transfer from front to back, then forward again by punching the accelerator; reading the terrain to ride over obstacles such as slippery rocks and roots before bringing the power back on; using the steering to rock the vehicle from side to side, increasing grip alternately from left to right. It may sound improbable when they describe it to you, but it works.

The driving sensation is direct and physical. Unless you've got power steering, the wheel takes some turning, and when it kicks (thumbs up) as you drop into a big rut, there's no question of stopping it. The ride is as you would expect, only worse - lurching and rolling, with the occasional bang from below as the vehicle "bellies out".

Progress, both across the ground and in driving technique, comes by degrees. The various stages, from Mickey Mouse and the Graveyard Run, to Shooters Alley, the Stump Run and Figure Eight higher up the hill, get ever harder. Each one mixes new tests together in a tighter area, with less breathing space - a confidence-building way to learn. By the time I'd knocked over a small tree half-way through the afternoon, I felt in total control, master of my machine and the environment (a sapling is planted for every tree mown down).

I knew I was ready for the Dragon's Back, the final trail which blends insane drops with tight turns, obstacles and deep water, never allowing a moment's slack. By the third time round without a stutter, I was really enjoying myself, and I'd devised my own off-road driving rules: trust the instructor, trust the machine, and trust your thumbs to do as they're told.

The hardware
"Ergonomics" wasn't in the dictionary when they built the Series One Land Rover; whatever the technical reasons for minimal use of the pedals, they're such hard work that you won't feel inclined to use them at all. On very steep stall-starts - the only time the foot-

brake was used - I got just enough downward force on the pedal by bracing my knee under the steering-wheel for extra leverage.

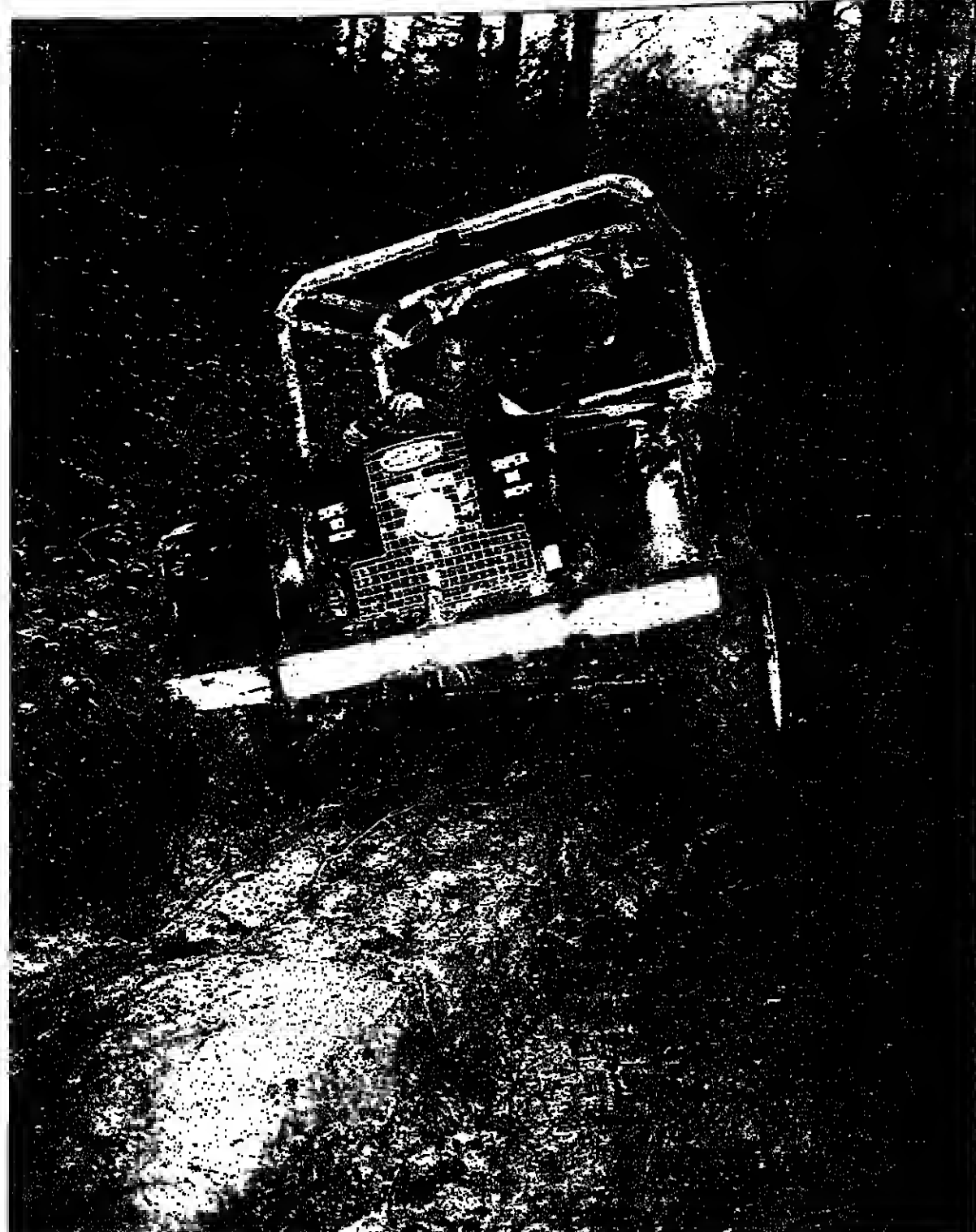
Modern-day four-wheel-drives are a different story, though for serious off-roading, early Land Rover models have a strong following, due in part to the use of bodywork in tight manoeuvres. Based on extreme London parking techniques, this involves using every corner of the vehicle to contact obstacles when necessary, levering round trees, using the side of the vehicle as a pivot.

Learning about how a four-wheel-drive works and confident talk of "diff locks" and "transmission wind-up" is, for many, a less appealing aspect of the subject. In practice, having enough theory to understand how the machine transmits its power to the ground under varying conditions is fundamental - and doesn't require prior knowledge of, or even interest in, motor sport.

Courses

Unless you want to bring your own 4x4, all you need for a day's off-roading are old clothes, waterproof jacket and trousers, boots, and a high mud tolerance. The best machines have no windscreen or windows, so be prepared for the elements. In dry summer conditions, dust and (surprisingly) reduced control are major factors. It's extremely unlikely that driving will ever be cancelled owing to weather conditions: when off-road, adverse equals better. Whatever the time of year, you'll spend all day never getting out of second gear.

One-day introductions to off-roading at the Baskerville Challenge in Herefordshire are available through Acorn Activities (01432 830083) who can provide a complete package including accommodation nearby. They also have off-road locations in Shropshire and Wales. A more serious two-day course for professional four-wheel-drive users such as mountain rescue, police and fire services is also available. (My thanks to Don Clarke, senior instructor at the Baskerville Challenge, and his 1952 Series One 80-inch wheelbase Land Rover.) The Land Rover Experience (0121 700 4619), based on a track at the Solihull Land Rover factory, offers courses at various levels for recreational and specialist professional drivers.



King off the road: the minimalist Land Rover soaks up mud and trees with ease

Photograph: Penny Kendall

GAMES

WILLIAM HARTSTON THE SUBLIME UNUSEFULNESS OF CHINDOGU

Have you ever wondered how to utilise the energy of crawling babies? Or how to improve a companion's accuracy in scratching your back? Or how to deal with the problem of noodles that are too hot?

If you have ever worried about such things, and particularly if you have worried about them enough to come up with a solution, but above all if that solution is inherently totally impractical, then you could easily have all the qualifications to master the oriental art of Chindogu.

The term - it means "strange tools" - was coined by the Japanese inventor and humourist Kenji Kawakami, whose book *101 Unuseless Inventions* was published in 1993 and followed, two years later, by *99 More Unuseless Japanese Inventions*. The concept of Unusefulness is central to the spirit of Chindogu. To qualify, an invention must be seen as a solution to a real problem, yet must, at some level, be so

deeply flawed that it is as near useless as makes no difference.

Like the cleaning pads that may be attached to a baby's limbs so that it polishes the floor as it learns to crawl; or the back-scratcher's t-shirt, which has a grid marked on the back so that instead of saying up-a-bit, left-a-bit, the scratchee can, on being told the coordinates of the scratcher's fingertip, direct him or her to the precise location of the itch; or the small fan that may be attached to a chopstick in order to cool noodles on their way from plate to mouth.

While Chindogu have been slow to gain great popularity in Japan, they have attained cult status in America and become widely admired in Germany. There are now some 10,000 members of the International Chindogu Society, which may be found on the Internet at this address: <http://www.pin.edu/~cstn3/chindogu.html> where there are also 10 examples of

the art, complete with photographs. "If you join now," the page tells us, "the \$10 membership fee is waived (sic), but you must provide a chindogu idea. (Don't worry about anyone 'stealing' your idea. If it is worth stealing, then it's not chindogu!)" Unbad spelling is also evidently not part of Chindogu.

The Society spells out the Ten Tenets of Chindogu, which together define the art:

- 1) A Chindogu cannot be for real use: it is fundamental to the spirit of Chindogu that inventions must, from a practical point of view, be almost completely useless.
- 2) A Chindogu must exist: a concept is not enough; you must have made it. "In order to be useless, it must first be."
- 3) Inherent in every Chindogu is the spirit of anarchy: they represent freedom of thought and action, broken free from the chains of usefulness.
- 4) Chindogu are tools for everyday

life: not specialised or technical inventions.

5) Chindogu are not for sale: even for a joke - if you accept money for one, you surrender your purity.

6) Humour must not be the sole reason for producing a Chindogu: humour is the by-product of a problem-solving activity.

7) Chindogu is not propaganda: they are made to be used, even though they cannot be used. They are not a comment on society.

8) Chindogu are never taboo. No cheap sexual innuendo.

9) Chindogu cannot be patented: they are offerings to the world.

10) Chindogu are without prejudice: for young and old, male and female, of all races and religions.

Ideas for Chindogu will be welcome at: Chindogu, Saturday Games, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL. No prizes, but we'll publish those we like best.

PANDORA MELLY GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Helen Storey, 38, designer
Kate Storey, 36, biologist.

We had two brothers, so there would be times when maybe the boys would play together, or we'd play with the boys. There was a lot of fighting, which is normal when you have four children in a very small flat.

Pillow-fights happened quite often, and we were occasionally given toys which would last for a bit and then break. We were given bows and arrows, so around Easter-time we were all Red Indians.

We also enjoyed scaring each other shyly by playing hide-and-seek. The flat was in a very dark Victorian villa in Belsize Park, so there were plenty of places to hide. You hid in the coat-rack with your feet in the wellington boots and waited until one of your siblings went past on their way to the lavatory. That was quite popular.

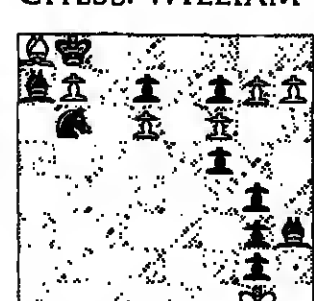
The two of us had a ridiculous game which we used to play when we were about 10 or 11. It was called boarding-schools. We knew some people who went to

boarding school. They slept there and they had another life. We thought that what you did at boarding school was ride horses all day and do anything you liked.

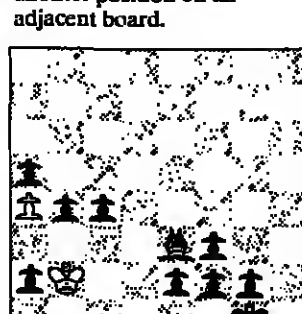
We would pretend we had horses when we went on our obligatory walks on Hampstead Heath every Sunday. We'd canter off into the distance, then we'd go into the bushes and have one of those strange conversations about being in a boarding school. Our imaginary boarding school had a lot to do with freedom; a place where we could organise things ourselves and be left to our own devices, but obviously our parents were quite nearby. Occasionally we got into trouble. We'd often run into the kinds of men in buses who wear raincoats. That shocked us, and eventually put an end to our boarding-school game.

Helen Storey's acclaimed autobiography 'Fighting Fashion' is published by Faber & Faber, price £25 (hardback), £12.99 (softback).

CHESS: WILLIAM HARTSTON



Black playing first, ending with White giving mate. It looked a tough one to crack, but before I had a chance to become engrossed in it, the Colonel set up another position on an adjacent board.



My old friend and colleague Colonel Walter Pothill drew my attention to today's position which, he tells me, he first encountered when he led Pothill's XI on a chess tour of South Africa in the early 50s. "We'd scarcely disembarked from the boat," the Colonel said, "when some chappie came up to us with a chess set and set up the position in the diagram above. Said it was a game from the South African championship. Black to move."

I glanced at the position and expressed some puzzlement. Black just moves his knight anywhere at all and it's mate.

"Ah," Pothill explained, "you don't understand the South Africans. At that time it was forbidden for Black to win. No, it was White who won the game - and in just seven moves."

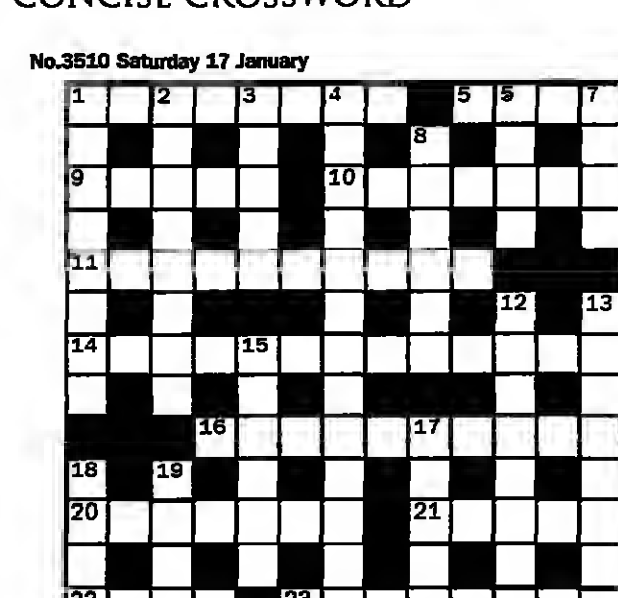
I suggested that Black must have just shuffled around, refusing to give mate, and then resigned, but Pothill said not: "Too patronising, old boy. No, the game must end in mate. Seven moves each,

I asked whether White had won this one, too - thinking that I was making a joke, but the colonel assured me that he had - and again in just seven moves each, with Black moving first. "Damn clever, these South Africans," he said. "Been playing by their own, White-always-wins, rules for so long, that they can always find a way, if there is one. It's an art form sadly lost in the modern world."

But before he could explain how either game had ended, he made his excuses and left. Perhaps you can work out the moves.

Answers: A) 1.f4 b8=N 2.f3 Ng6 3.fg6 g8=B 4.g5 Be6 5.dxe6 d7 6.Kc7 h8=R 7.e5 d8=Q mate. B) 1.a1=Q+ Kc2 2.Qe5 Kb1 3.Qb5 axb5 4.e1=B b6 5.f1=R h7 6.Kf2 h8=Q 7.g1=N Qb2 mate.

CONCISE CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Spoke indistinctly (8)
 - 5 Fruits of the may tree (4)
 - 9 Muslim leaders (3)
 - 10 Carrion-eating bird (7)
 - 11 Temperature-controlled switch (10)
 - 14 Disrespectful to superiors (13)
 - 16 Driving force (10)
 - 20 African country (7)
 - 21 Cunning (5)
 - 22 Record (4)
 - 23 Troublemaker (8)
- DOWN**
- 1 Uphold (8)
 - 2 Journey across (8)
 - 3 Surrey racecourse (5)
 - 4 Attempting to overhear conversation (13)
 - 6 Fit of fever (4)
 - 7 Appear (4)
 - 8 Cautious chemical (6)
 - 12 Advocate of non-violence (8)
 - 13 Santa's draught animals (8)
 - 15 Tedious (6)
 - 17 Of pale colour (5)
 - 18 Aid (4)
 - 19 Snare (4)
- Solution to yesterday's Concise Crossword:**
ACROSS: 1 Force, 4 Tar (Four-star), 7 Iris, 8 Tentacle, 9 Congratulate, 10 Closer, 13 Locker, 15 Swimming bath, 19 Lipstick, 20 Acid, 21 Gin, 22 Dwell. DOWN: 1 Forgo, 2 Resigns, 3 Extra, 4 Tara, 5 Relieve, 6 Annual, 11 Lasting, 12 Remain, 14 Calhague, 16 Isen, 17 Naked, 18 Trial.

BRIDGE: ALAN HIRON

North-South game; dealer South			
North		East	
♠ 3		♠ A J 10 9 5 4	
♥ Q 9 8 6 4		♥ 3 2	
♦ K 7 6 5		♦ Q J 10 9	
♣ Q 10 7		♣ 5	
West		South	
♠ 8 7 6		♠ 3	
♥ 5		♥ 6 4 3	
♦ 3		♦ A 9 8 5 3	
♣ K J 9 8 6 4 3 2		♣ A Q 7 4	

When you hold a hand such as South's on this deal, you may have a problem with your opening bid, but what you do not expect is the full orchestra striking up.

South opened One Heart. West pre-empted with Four Clubs and, under pressure, North decided to compete with Four Hearts. Not one to be excluded from the act, East was there with Four Spades and South jumped to Six Hearts. West considered a sacrifice in spades (which would have cost 1,100 points) but decided to pass.

West led ♠ 8 against Six Hearts and, after taking his ace, East returned his singleton club. Now South was able to claim, explaining that he was drawing trumps and throwing two diamonds from dummy on ♠ K.Q.

This cost East-West 1,430 points and East was mildly irritated that his partner had not saved. West, however, remained unapologetic, for he had studied the full hand. We can defeat Six Hearts," he claimed.

"Rubbish," replied his partner politely. Well, who was right? It was the inoffensive West whose analysis was more accurate. Suppose that East had withheld his SA at trick one. It would have been a play that could easily have been wrong but, as the cards lie, although South does not lose a spade trick, he cannot escape two diamond losers.

BACKGAMMON: CHRIS BRAY

Despite its importance, there have been very few books devoted purely to the topic of doubling. Two books were published in 1982. If you ever come across a copy of *Dynamic Cube Strategies* by Gaby Horowitz and Bruce Roman my advice would be to tread warily, much of its content having been shown to be flawed. The second book was in an altogether different class and is still excellent reading if you can find a copy. It is *The Doubling Cube in Backgammon - Vol. 1* by Jeff Ward. Intended originally as the first in a multi-volume set, it sets out very clearly the basics of doubling and redoubling, including the maths for those who want to delve that deep, and examines racing doubles in great depth. Ward's refinement of the Thorpe Count, known not unsurprisingly as the Ward Count is well worth knowing. It is a great shame he never found time to write the subsequent volumes.

A new book *Backgammon: Winning with the Doubling Cube* by Peter Bell has just been published by the Gammon Press. While more verbose than Ward's tome and despite some of the prose being somewhat transatlantic, it summarises in 200 pages the basics of doubling. It looks at doubling cube fundamentals, when and when not to double, how to evaluate winning chances, when to take, the psychology of doubling, and it provides a number of benchmark positions for typical game types. It also looks at how to change your play of the men depending upon who owns the cube, and includes some amusing anecdotes to illustrate points made in the text.

Bell also looks at the difficult problem of evaluating blitzes, backgames and prime v prime positions by the use of formulae. These formulae are as yet unproved, but in the complex world of doubling something is better than nothing and they are certainly a step forward. At times, the book goes a little fast for my liking but if you are going to cover the doubling cube in a short book then there will have to be some elements that can only be touched on lightly. At \$30 plus \$12 postage and packing this is not cheap, but if you are serious about improving and want to gain a better understanding of doubling cube theory then the investment is worthwhile. Like all backgammon books it will take several readings to get the best out of it and then will come the most difficult part: putting into practice what you have learnt. Gammon Press, PO Box 294, Arlington MA 02174, USA. Tel: 001-617-641-2091.

13/OUTDOORS

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 17 JANUARY 1998
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What did you think of chapter 3?

You may have read a book – but you haven't experienced it to the full until you've discussed it with another reader. Or so say members of the increasingly popular readers' groups. Mike Higgins reports.

"A masterpiece that moves faster than the speed of thought," the *New York Times* said of *Neuromancer*. The *Observer* described its author, William Gibson, as "the Raymond Chandler of SF". But "Cyber-wank," reckons Sarah Rogers, of the Earls Court Waterstone's Book Discussion Group.

Few other members of the group are as forthright as the 51-year-old textile conservator, but the American writer's novel is nevertheless getting an old-fashioned panning. Even Martin, a sci-fi fan, is left cold after a dip in Gibson's hyper-noir.

The group is nothing if not thorough. Back in November, science fiction had been agreed upon as the genre for January's meeting, and the book club organiser, Jack Noe, assistant manager at Waterstone's, drew up a short list of half-a-dozen novels. December's meeting came, and the group voted that *Neuromancer* would be read in preparation for tonight's discussion.

With such diligence behind them, and two hours in Waterstone's ahead, the group seems to feel it would be churlish, not to mention wasting a journey, to dismiss a seminal piece of contemporary literature out of hand.

So David, a sixtiesomething economist, reflects graciously on the glossary of techno terms Gibson has coined, and Alasdair, a 31-year-old advertising account manager, admits that *Neuromancer*'s descriptive passages have their visionary moments. Ironically, it's Jack Noe who has got the least time for Gibson.

The home of the reading, or book discussion group is America. It is estimated that well over a million groups thrive in bookshops, libraries and homes across the States, offering the avid reader not just general literature but specialist material in groups that may concentrate solely, for example, on politics or mystery fiction.

Reading groups, formally at least, have yet to take a big hold in the UK. Coordinated efforts to promote them seem to centre on the north, where Bradford Libraries lead the way. As well as offering a varied programme of reading groups, they also publish a guide to finding "a good read", *Opening the Book*. Yet in London, when we asked various libraries, publishers and arts institutions about readers' groups they expressed regret that they had little information, concluding that "something ought to be done".

The 12 members of the Earls Court Waterstone's group all looked as though they couldn't wait to get to the meeting and let rip. "The frustration of reading a really good book is being unable to talk to others about it because they haven't read it," says Alasdair.

If anything unites the group, it's this thirst for "a good read" – a desire Jack underestimated when he first established the group in the summer of 1996. "Attendance was really erratic the first year," he remembers. "The mailing list was really local, and we ended up having 15 people one month and three the next. So we read it in *Time Out* and got a big response. It's better now, because we've got people from all over London."

Waterstone's, by way of response, charges no membership fee, laying on nibbles and a few bottles of wine as well.

Surely, though, a discussion in a large working bookshop is a poor second to a private readers' group in the comfort of someone's home? Not according to Alasdair, who tried and failed to set up a private readers' group himself, or indeed Geraldine Kelley: "I have friends in private book clubs who said that they'd prefer to come to this," she laughs. "Home meetings tend to be a group of friends gossiping and worrying about what food they're going to prepare – they get off the real point of the meeting."

Not that there aren't digressions tonight. Gibson's jargon-littered narrative has induced group future-shock, and everyone soon tires of attempting to unravel the labyrinthine plot. Instead, the discussion ambles into related areas: definitions of cyberspace; where Gibson stands in relation to Huxley and Orwell; sci-fi's doubtful universal appeal. The exchanges are amiable, free of any self-consciousness and, from a group apparently dumbfounded by their chosen text, sustained without much recourse to Jack Noe for direction.

For Alasdair, though, consensus is not the point of the evening. "When everybody either hates or loves a book, then the discussion is a bit limited – Chekhov everybody loved, and tonight's book everybody hated. It's good if there's an antagonist in the group."

The healthy appetite for differences in opinion is reflected in what Jack Noe sees as the typical motivations of those attending readers' groups: to read more, and also more widely. "Usually you read what you're interested in, and you don't go outside that particular area," says Nick, a 29-year-old pianist. "But each month we have a different subject. For instance, it's Indian writing next month, something I've never read in my life. It also focuses you – you have to read the book in four weeks."

The group buys each month's selection from Jack at a 10 per cent discount – next up is *Heat and Dust* by Ruth Praver Jhabvala – and he insists that the club is not really about shifting books: "It's about customer relations, because they get to know and hopefully trust my recommendations. It gives the shop a personal element."

Meanwhile, Fiona Woods, a 26-year-old IT assistant, typifies the enthusiasm of the group: "When you read a really good book, you almost want to broadcast the fact. Sometimes talking about it is even more enjoyable than reading it."

Waterstone's, 266 Earls Court Road, London SW5 (0171-370 1616). Robert Walters at Bradford Libraries (01274 753 666)



Brief encounter with shifting sands



Continuing his series on great short railway journeys, Matthew Bruce enjoys a nostalgic trip around Morecambe Bay on a scenic line to the Lakelands.

If Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard could see Carnforth station today they would weep even more than they did when filming the famous steam scene there in *Brief Encounter* in 1945. The limestone walls are moss-covered and crumbling. The paint in the abandoned booking office has peeled away – in some places so badly as to reveal the original bricks under years of plaster. The only light relief is offered by the graffiti, which are touchingly innocent in their lack of swear words. "Kerry D is fit," by Phillie," reads one, written perhaps after a modern-day brief encounter between two teenagers.

The two-sided station clock looks as if it might have survived since the film was released. It hangs precariously from wires, like an over-sized wristwatch with a threadbare strap that could snap at any moment. One side told me it was 3.20, the other a minute past two. Neither was right.

From the platform you can see Steamtown, a museum that houses a fine collection of steam locomotives. It looked as though it would have been worth a visit, had I been able to find the way in.

I think I found the spot where Johnson and Howard left the station café and walked across the platform enveloped in locomotive steam. But all remnants of a café are long gone: the windows and doors have been boarded up and broken into and boarded up again, and only the leaking gutters and metal skeletons of signs creaking in the wind break the silence. It was spooky, and I was glad of some company, even if it was a gang of excitable schoolboys with ties at half-mast.

The one excellent reason for coming to this forlorn little station in north Lancashire is that

the Barrow-in-Furness trains come through here on the branch line from Preston, heading for the Lakes. The 16-mile stretch from Carnforth to the gentrified holiday resort of Grange-over-Sands follows the stunning coastline as it curves round the head of Morecambe Bay. When the track was first laid in 1867, wealthy businessmen from Lancashire and Yorkshire built elegant homes in Grange and commuted to Preston or Lancaster along this picturesque route.

Carnforth sits almost on the Irish Sea coast, and as my train pulled out north across Warton Sands I found it hard to distinguish between land and sea. Mudflats that looked like the boggy limits of a nature reserve at low tide would be covered with water in a few hours. Our two-carriage train skimmed the tops of the reed beds. After the hamlet of Crag Foot we passed between small, wooded knolls and mist-wrapped villages that might have graced any of CS Lewis's Narnia stories. Even the names sounded right – Silverdale,

Waterslack, Arnside, Middlebarrow Wood.

In the cold winter light the bay looked like a sheet of steel. We crossed the estuary of the river Kent on a viaduct. I watched Holme Island, farther west along the coast towards Grange, rise up out of the sea haze like Atlantis. Just beyond the track sleepers, rivulets in the mud snaked away towards the sea. Grange station is a little way past Holme Island and a set of rocks called Seldom Seen – which need renaming, because they have been uncovered for the last 30 years. The town fits invitingly into a cleft below the cliffs. Looking out to sea at low tide from the platform, the shoreline seems miles away and the sand looks solid enough, but these flats are treacherous.

Before the coming of the railway, the only way to get from Morecambe to Grange was over the sands (hence the name). I learnt from an excellent guidebook, written and produced by the children of Grange Church of England primary school, that whereas some travellers waited for a boat at high

tide, others braved it in a horse and carriage. A coachman would stand up high on the back of the carriage as a look-out, scouring the ground ahead for hidden channels and patches of deadly quicksand that lurked under the surface. It may sound dangerous, but the alternative was to risk being robbed by highwaymen along the road to the north. Today there is a footpath marked on the Ordnance Survey map right across the sands. It gives a red warning to anyone thinking of going for a stroll: "Public rights of way across Morecambe Bay can be dangerous. Seek local guidance." Seeking urgent psychiatric help might be more appropriate. The mud has claimed lives in the past.

A more leisurely way of enjoying Grange is to spend a while examining the station. It is a gem. A £500,000 refurbishment has returned the Grade II listed buildings to their former glory, and the Railway Heritage Trust recently honoured it as one of the top three stations in the country. It has survived two world wars, nationalisation and privatisation, almost unscathed. The town clerk, Frank Brooks, is proud of these achievements. "We fought a long battle to get it looking like this," he told me, as he rushed around the town hall placing name-plates for a council meeting. "Railtrack wanted to make it single-line but we said no, this is a tourist destination and you can't do that, and we won."

This is not the end of the line. You can take trains on from here to Ulverston and Barrow-in-Furness, but for thousands of tourists each year, Grange and its surrounding countryside is magic enough.

On the footplate
When to go: open all year round (check with tourist office for sand walks)

How much: Preston to Grange-over-Sands via Carnforth day return, £6.80 adults, £3.40 for children aged five to 15.

Information: North Western trains on 0345 484950 or 0161 228 5906 (cycle information), or 0161 228 5907 (facilities for the disabled), and Grange Tourist office on 015395 34026.



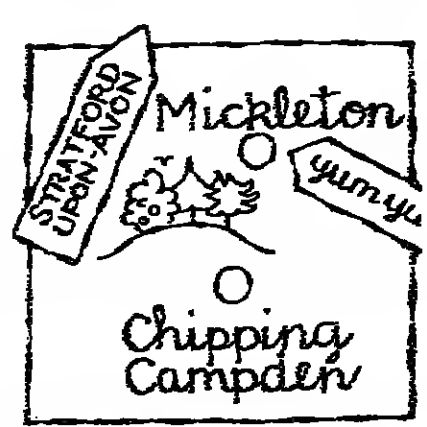
At the head of Morecambe Bay: view over the River Kent (top); Arnside station (above)
Photographs: Tom Pilston

What, when, where ...

Feeling peckish after Christmas? Go wild at the Great British Pudding Festival, held at the Three Ways House Hotel in Mickleton. Those who take their puddings really seriously can stay in the Spotted Dick and Custard bedroom (booking essential) and feast themselves at the Pudding Parade of seven puddings, including one mysteriously known as "Lord Randall".

And if you're still ambulant the following day, you can join in a Cotswold ramble to work up an appetite for the next pudding event.

The Great British Pudding Festival is held between 16 and 30 January at the Three Ways House Hotel, Mickleton, Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire (01386 438429).
Sally Kindberg



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15/RACING

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 17 JANUARY 1993
15



'We regularly lay horses to lose a quarter of a million in a single bet,' says Victor Chandler, the master of the rails

Photograph: Herbie Knott

Victor Chandler: last of the real bookmakers

The man who sponsors today's big race at Ascot will also be shouting the odds as the runners go to post. Victor Chandler is not just a bookie, he is one of the few fearless bookies that remain. The only thing that worries him is the future of his profession.

Victor Chandler is looking very well - for a relic. There is the trademark sharp suit, a monogrammed shirt, and more than a hint of unseasonal tan on a face which betrays barely half of its 46 years. In fact, there is no doubt about it. Victor Chandler is looking very well, full stop.

But a relic he still is, in one sense at least. Fifty years ago, the betting rings of British racecourses were seething with fearless bookmakers - Chandler's father and grandfather among them - for whom a serious bet was a challenge, not a threat. They were punters, too. On the wall of Chandler's office near Regent's Park is a large portrait of Sterope, who won the Cambridgeshire in 1948. It was commissioned by his father, "Old" Victor, who was one of the few people at Newmarket who

backed him. Sterope started at 40-1, and injected almost £50,000 (the equivalent of a cool £1m these days) into the family coffers.

These days, bookies like that are a breed on the edge of extinction. Some may say that one man with a big satchel is no different from the next, but you need only glance at the race which Chandler sponsors at Ascot today to see what sets him apart. Remember the Ladbroke Hurdle a week ago? Two dozen handicappers on the tightest of tracks. Chandler, on the other hand, promotes a select handicap chase, which regularly attracts the finest two-milers in training, horses like Waterlily Boy, Viking Flagship and Desert Orchid.

"I love the jumping, so I wanted a chase," he says, "and when this came up, it was perfect. The nice thing is that we can entertain about 120 clients, and a lot of my clients have become friends over the years. There are people like Brian Stewart Brown, who won our race last year [with Ask Tom], he's a good friend and a client for a long time. He bashes me up a bit more often than I'd like, but you've got to take a long-term view. It's very hard to consider closing down someone who's a true sportsman, who

looks after small trainers as well and isn't frightened to have a go. That's the sort of people we need in the game."

In all, Chandler has more than 3,000 clients on his books, and sends out about 1,200 bills after a normal fortnight's trading. But a brave bookie needs a braver punter to keep him in business, and the right sort of customer is ever more difficult to find.

"The late 1980s were very good for us," he says, "but society has changed a great deal. The work ethic in the City has changed a lot, so you don't get stockbrokers taking Wednesday afternoon off to go racing any more. Midweek, the big players just aren't there. One Friday at Newbury a few weeks ago, we took £20 on one race, and nothing like that had happened before. I was shocked."

As a result, the two big Festival meetings, Royal Ascot and Cheltenham, grow ever more important. "We rely on those meetings to make the business pay these days. At Cheltenham, there are individual players who will have £40,000 or £50,000 on, and we regularly lay horses to lose a quarter of a million in a single bet. It might sound blasé to say that, but the figures depend on your circumstances at the time, and the racing is so competitive that people don't fall on one horse like they do at Sandown on a Saturday. You might lay six or seven horses to lose huge amounts in the same race, and five or six others as well."

Even so, there is no guaranteed profit when the tapes go up. Chandler laid a bet of £20,000 at 9-2 about Vagador just before the start of the Supreme Novices' Hurdle in 1988, not to mention dozens of others in what was a headlong gamble. Almost 10 years on, just a mention of the name brings a slight glaze to his eyes. "Terrific," he mutters. "We fell into a trap there." It still hurts.

BY GREG WOOD

There was also the famous case of the man who lost a fortune and then got it all back. "He was at Royal Ascot the whole week. I had him right behind the eight-ball, he was really firing at me. It was the best week we'd ever had, and all through it I was going home and telling my wife how clever we'd been. Then he went on to the evening meeting on the Friday

and he was losing even more. In the last race, he backed the winner, got the forecast up, and the Tricast as well. It came to just under £1m, and it was everything he'd lost in the whole week. I had to be carried out of the office."

Ultimately, of course, there are more losers than winners, as the huge BMW with a VC number plate in the garage beneath his office testifies. Yet still there are not enough of them to fill the tank entirely, and these days, Chandler is a regular punter too. He employs a private handicapper, a time expert and someone else who keeps his ear to the ground exclusively on Victor's behalf. On an average Saturday at the races, he might make a book on three or four races, and punt on the rest, either by walking into the ring and having a bet, or laying a horse he does not fancy.

Above all, though, he remains the betting ring's most obvious target. The average punter can only dream of staking the sort of sums which Chandler will accept, but if they had that kind of money, he is the man they would all love to take on. It is something to do with the way he stands there in a cashmere coat and Saville Row suit, and dares you to, no matter who you are, or what

you know. "If you're on the wrong end of a plot and it costs you a lot of money, you might scream and weep a bit," he says, "but some trainers have got to survive like that. If a trainer hasn't got many horses, they'll have to have a bet occasionally to pay the wages. I take a slightly different attitude to the Jockey Club, but if they're blatant they get pulled in, and if they're clever they don't, and the punters love it. You can look back to people like Ron Smyth, who basically made a living out of punting. People like that are my heroes." Try as you might, it is hard to imagine the head accountant at Ladbrokes taking a similar view.

But the Chandler challenge will not be there forever, and it may be that a punter in 2020 will not understand what a proper, old-time bookmaker is. "I've no children, so I look like being the last," Chandler, a fourth-generation bookie, says. "By now, there should be people coming up to replace the likes of Stephen [Little] and me, but the unfortunate thing is that people with the mentality to be a bookmaker will now find that the Forex market and the trading floors will pay a lot better."

So take him on now, while you still have the chance. If you dare.

Will a Green Green rascal come home?

Al Capone was born on 17 January and today also promises to be a television widow-maker of an afternoon with 10 races available across the airwaves. Only those with access to the extraterrestrial, however, will be able to watch the excitement from Newcastle, where Sky begins its pitch for the Saturday market.

Team Murdoch has signed a contract with Gosforth Park which means the track's notable contests, such as the Eider Chase and the Northumberland Plate, are exclusively theirs. Today's offering is hardly up to that standard, though the Dipper Novices' Chase is both valuable and not without interest. The name horse here is Green Green Desert (3.00), one of those marvellous beasts whom everyone seems to know even though he's not brilliant. What he is, is an undisciplined scamp.

Green Green Desert made a great skill of finishing in the frame on the Flat while at the same time conveying the impression he could have won with a smidgen more application. They thought obstacles might iron him out, but they thought wrongly. The seven-year-old still fools around, but such is his natural ability that he has won four of his last five races. He should succeed again today, but it's not worth putting good money on that eventuality.

At Warwick, there is another Lad of the turf in the shape of Sister Stephanie. Graham McCourt's mare has established that it is far less breathtaking to stand rock still when the tapes go up than amble off with the rest of her species. Last Saturday, she did actually start at Sandown, but she was soon finished, falling at the first. Selecting one scoundrel on a Saturday is probably more than enough, so the old mare is passed over here for another of her sex, CERIDWEN (nap 2.35).

The tough nut to crack on this card is the 26-runner handicap hurdle, but as most of the field are out of the handicap, it may not be quite as unfathomable as it first appears. The one to be is Pricedful (next best 3.10), who was overpowering at Cheltenham last time. He will need to be good to beat Lord Jim.

Even Lingfield has its attractions today, when the sugar daddies of Ladbrokes stage the all-weather handicap final, though the main card of the weekend, of course, is at saturated Ascot. Off air the principal interest will centre on Bellator, who is being talked about as a possible winner of both the Tote Gold Trophy and the Champion Hurdle. If he can't win today he'll capture neither of the other two.

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Ceridwen
(Warwick 2.35)
NB: Green Green Desert
(Newcastle, 3.00)

Royal Toast (1.15) looks good for starters, and the run of Super Tactics (1.45) will give us a clue as to how Celibate might perform in the day's top event, the Victor Chandler Chase. When the pair meet here last month, Super Tactics was given a sound thrashing.

The betting shape of the Victor Chandler exhibits just how open the race is. There are claims for Or Royal, even though his best distance is probably beyond two miles, and Mulligan, who spends more time on the floor than in the ring.

Celibate (2.20), like his trainer, Charlie Mann, has had a chequered career, which includes a second in the Belgian Champion Hurdle at Waregem. He was beaten six and a half lengths by Or Royal in the Arkle Chase at last year's Festival, so the weights give him a sporting chance of revenge.

Sheikhs give blessing to plan

Sheikh Mohammed and Hamdan Al Maktoum have given their support to the British Horseracing Board's newly unveiled financial plan and urged the BHB to put it to the Government "as soon as possible". But Sheikh Mohammed repeated his threat that he and his family will pull their horses out of Britain if a "fairer" financial structure is not introduced.

Peter Savill, a leading British owner and a director of the

BHB, hailed as a success the visit he and the trainer John Gosden made to Dubai to discuss the plan with the two Sheikhs. "Both were fully supportive of the plan," he said.

Their threats still hang heavy in the air of racing, however, and as if to emphasise this point Sheikh Hamdan moved his Middle Park Stakes winner, Hayil, and 11 other horses that were trained by the late David Morley to France yesterday.

McCoy can time Royal accession

The former National Hunt jockey Steve Smith Eccles (right) gives a runner-by runner analysis of today's Victor Chandler Handicap Chase.



Mulligan: Top weight will not do his chances any good. A useful horse at his best but cannot be trusted to put in a clear round.

Or Royal: A class young horse who is still improving. He won last year's Arkle Trophy at the Cheltenham Festival and his jockey, Tony McCoy, is keen on his chances. Or Royal will be suited by a strong pace but don't expect to see his grey nose until the closing stages.

Celibate: Came good last time over this course and distance, winning the Frogmere Handicap Chase. Mick Fitzgerald takes the reins and I expect to see the combination in the frame.

Jeffell: Irish raider who loves to bowl along in front and usually jumps well. However, I cannot see him getting into the front line on what he has achieved this season.

Leotard: Has an excellent each-way chance. He would have finished second to Celibate rather than fourth but for making mistakes in the closing stages of the Frogmere Chase.

Aretic Kinsman: Nigel Twiston-Davies's horses are hitting a real purple patch after a slow start and there has been some money for this grey. He ran poorly at Cheltenham last time and has a bit to find in my book.

Lord Doreet: Flattered when second to a below-par Viking Flagship at Wetherby. He will have his supporters but I am not one of them.

Cumbrion Challenge: In great form, winning his last four starts. He races in a higher league this time but is an improving sort who can run a big race.

Native Mission: The rise in the weights is to his advantage and his trainer, Jimmy Fitzgerald, rates his chances. Needs to show dramatic improvement to play any part.

Conclusion: There is sure to be plenty of pace and that should suit OR ROYAL, who likes to come late. Tony McCoy is bullish about his chances, while Mulligan's hopes hinge on his jumping. Leotard, Celibate and Cumbrion Challenge to battle it out for the minor placings.



GREG WOOD THE A-Z OF BETTING

R is for . . .

Racecard: Usually a thin, shoddy pamphlet costing anything up

to £2 which is of no use to man or beast. As a rule, the people who write the brief comments on each runner do not so much hedge their bets, as plant a mass of pine and spruce which would do credit to the Forestry Commission. Do yourself a favour and take a newspaper instead. This one, preferably.

Ramsden, Jack: One of the shrewdest punters operating in British betting, and as such his name is the only thing he has in common with . . .

Ramsden, Terry: Who was a colourful addition to racecourse life during the 1980s, when his excursions into the ring were spectacular and ill-judged in equal measure. Strangely, some who remember those heady days still believe that Tel gave the bookies a hiding. In fact, it

was quite the opposite, and Ramsden was such a regular loser that many layers imagined they had died and gone to heaven (which was rather a presumption, since when the time comes most of them are booked on a one-way ticket in the opposite direction). Though his company, Glen International, apparently did something clever in the Japanese markets, no one ever worked out precisely what it was, or why it should be so wildly lucrative that Ramsden could cheerfully stick £250,000 each-way on Mr Snuffit, his runner in the 1986 National. Whatever it was, it went pear-shaped in the crash of 1987, and Terry was warned off for non-payment of gambling debts. Still, it was fun while it lasted.

Raak, Mrs J V: Who was known to all and sundry as

"Pat" during her punting career in the immediate post-war years. She married Jimmy Rank, one of the richest men of his day, and set about gambling away his money almost as fast as he could make it. The story goes that Jimmy eventually felt it necessary to buy a bookmaking firm behind his wife's back, and then arrange for most of her business to be channelled through it in order to preserve at least some of his fortune. What an old romantic.

Rules of Racing: Of which there are many hundreds, although only those which may affect the pay-out after a race are of serious interest to punters. This boils down to riding offences, and not so much the letter of the law, as its interpretation by the local stewards, who are famous for many

things but not, in general, consistency. The Jockey Club, to be fair, has tweaked the regulations down the years and fewer horses which were winners on merit are now losing the race in the stewards' room, but such issues as whether or not a horse has improved its placing - which can make the difference between a result standing or being thrown out - will always be subjective, in much the same way as no referee can honestly say whether someone in an offside position in football is actually interfering with play. The only possible solution from a punting point of view is to bet with one of the dozens of independent bookies who still offer a "double-result" concession, that is, they pay on both outcomes when a result is overturned. You may not be startled to hear that this

offer is not available with Ladbrokes, William Hill or Coral.

Rules of Betting: There are a lot of these as well, so many in fact that when they stick them up in betting shops, they use such miniature type that no one can ever be bothered to read them. No matter, though, because the most important rule of all is the one that is not written down, specifically: *Thou shalt not win.* This ultimate law is enforced by any number of means, the most effective being that employed by credit bookmakers, who close the accounts of anyone in danger of breaking it. Irritating though this may be for the customer, there is no greater accolade in the punting world than to receive a snippy letter from a bookie telling you that your business is no longer required.

LINGFIELD	
HYPERION	
1.05 Bon Guest 1.40 Mystical 2.10 Phantom Ring	
2.45 Nisaba 3.20 Barbason 3.50 Cossack Count	
DRINK: Standard, Stall: 1m - outside, rest - inside	
DRAW ADVANTAGE: Low in sprints	
● Left-hand, sharp course	
● Course to SE of town on B2022. Lingfield station adjoins course.	
ADMISSION: £20 (under 16s free). CAR PARK: Club £5, rest free.	
● LEADING TRAINERS: G. L. Moore - 74 winners from 548 runners gives success ratio of 13.5%; M. Johnston 50 from 271 (18.5%); R. Hannon 44 from 310 (14.2%); G. P. Hannon 35 from 323 (10.8%);	
● LEADING JOCKEYS: A. Clark 64 wins from 515 rides gives a success ratio of 12.4%; S. Sanders 56 from 526 (10.6%); S. White 40 from 302 (13.2%); T. Williams 21 from 212 (9.9%);	
● FAVOURITES: 685 wins in 2,222 races (31.3%);	
SLANGED FIRST TIME: Prince Of Wales (2.0); Mondosa (2.20)	
STUBBS AMATEURS HANDICAP (CLASS F) £3,000 added 1m 4f	
1.04-10 PATTERN (5) (G) G. L. Moore 5.11; Mr J. Morgan (7) 10	
2.00-10 ROYAL CELESTINE (5) D. Williams 5.12; Mr R. Shaw (5) 17	
3.00-10 BOWQUEST (5) (C) Mrs B. Sanders 4.10; Mr R. Shaw (5) 17	
4.00-10 CHAMBERLAIN (11) S. Dow 4.10; Mr R. Shaw (5) 17	
5.00-10 CALL MY GUEST (12) S. P. Hannon 4.10; Mr S. P. Hannon (4) 7	

6.00-10 LAUREL BECKER (25) (C) Mrs A. Parnell 4.10; Mrs A. Parnell 4	
7.00-10 SUELY WHALLAN (14) R. Hannon 4.10; Mr C. Vigners 4	
8.00-10 HEYER GOLF EAGLE (18) (C) G. L. Moore 5.11; Mr J. Morgan (7) 10	
9.00-10 GLIDE PATH (14) (C) J. Jenkins 5.10; Mr J. Morgan (7) 10	
10.00-10 RETENDER (28) (C) J. P. Hannon 5.11; Mrs L. Pearce 14	
11.00-10 NACHTMANN (11) R. Hannon 5.11; Mrs L. Pearce 14	
12.00-10 AQUAVITA (25) (C) J. S. Moore 4.10; Mrs S. Moore (5) 15	
13.00-10 DONT DROP DROPPERS (25) (C) R. Hannon 5.11; Mrs J. Parnell 13	
14.00-10 MYCOSOTIS (21) P. Hannon 5.11; Mrs J. Parnell 13	
15.00-10 LER CRU (7) G. Bright 5.11; Mrs S. Parnell 13	
16.00-10 ROYAL CRUCIS (7) (C) P. Hannon 5.11; Mrs S. Parnell 13	
17.00-10 TOMRAN (14) J. Bridge 5.11; Mrs S. Parnell 13	
BETTING: 7-4 Laurel Becker, 5-1 Don't Drop Droppers, 7-1 Bon Guest, 5-1 Aquavita, Royal Circus, 10-1 Cheltenham, 14-1 No Pattern, 10-1 others	
HARRINGTON BIRD CLAIMING STAKES (CLASS E) £3,750 added 6f	
1.530-10 ROFFEY SPINNEY (16) (C) R. Hannon 5.11; W. J. O'Connor 5	
2.001-10 MYSTICAL (11) (C) Mrs L. Pearce 4.10; S. Whitehead 7	
3.006-10 THE FRISKY FARMER (17) (C) W. J. O'Connor 5.11; S. Whitehead 7	
4.002-10 ULTRA BEET (5) (C) P. Hannon 5.11; L. Chamberlain 13	
5.00-10 SLIGHTLY OVER (5) D. Williams 4.10; Emily Doyle (7) 3	
6.00-10 SUPERLAD (16) (C) J. Bridge 5.11; P. Doe (7) 8	
7.00-10 MELBOURNE PRINCESS (28) R. Whicker 4.10; A. McCarthy (7) 4	
BETTING: 6-4 Mystical, 7-4 Ultra Beet, 5-1 Roffey Spinney, 12-1 The Frisky Farmer, Melbourne Princess, 14-1 Superlad, 33-1 Slightly Over	

2.10 SNAKES MEDIUM AUCTION MAIDEN STAKES (CLASS E) £3,750 3YO 6f	
1.00-10 PRINCE OF SALSA (C) K. McAuliffe 9.0; W. J. O'Connor 7	
2.00-10 RED PEPPER (8) P. Hannon 9.0; S. Whitehead 7	
3.00-10 CHAMPIONSHIP (7) Mrs L. Pearce 8.9; A. McCarthy (7) 3	
4.00-10 MANSANA (10) R. Whicker 8.9; Mrs S. Moore (5) 15	
5.00-10 MISS THE CUT (11) R. Hannon 8.9; R. Smith (7) 4	
6.00-10 PHANTOM RIDER (4) S. P. Hannon 8.9; J. Boyle (7) 2	
BETTING: 7-4 Nisaba, 5-2 Accystan, 7-2 Dancing Rio, 10-1 Rest Repet, 7-1 Cheltenham, 10-1 Marlene, 25-1 Magic Morning, Prince Of Salsa	
MUNNINGS LIMITED STAKES (CLASS F) £3,000 added 3YO 1m 2f	
1.00-10 ACCYSTAN (7) P. Hannon 8.9; L. Chamberlain 13	
2.00-10 DANCING RIO (7) (C) P. Hannon 8.9; P. P. Murphy (7) 3	
3.00-10 NISABA (11) (C) J. S. Moore 8.9; A. Whelan 2	
4.00-10 ESTOPPED (7) W. J. O'Connor 8.9; A. Whelan 2	
BETTING: 4-4 Nisaba, 5-2 Accystan, 7-2 Dancing Rio, 10-1 Estopped	
CECIL ALDIN HANDICAP (CLASS D) £5,000 added 1m	
1.00-10 BRILLIANT RED (42) (C) P. Hannon 5.10; A. Clark 11	
2.00-10 TOUGH LEADER (23) R. Hannon 4.10; S. Sanders 4	
3.00-10 ROSE HADIC (25) (C); Montagu Hall 5.9.9; M. Hurdell (7) 6	
4.00-10 BARBARON (14) (C) G. L. Moore 5.11; Candy Moore 7	
5.00-10 KALIMAT (11) (C) W. J. O'Connor 4.10; P. Doe (7) 8	
6.00-10 ROYAL CARLTON (7) (C) G. L. Moore 5.11; S. Whitehead 7	

7.00-10 MONDOZA (54) (C) D. Murphy 5.11; S. C. Leathley (5) 9	
8.00-10 SHADES OF LOVE (50) V. Smead 4.7; C. Butler 9	
9.00-10 COMMANCHE COMPANION (10) (C) T. J. Naughton 4.8.5; D. Carter 5	
10.00-10 PRINCE IT BLACK (7) (C) D. Murphy 5.11; A. McCarthy (7) 2	
11.00-10 FANCY DESIGN (14) P. Hannon 5.11; A. McCarthy (7) 10	
BETTING: 5-4 Commanche Companion, 5-1 Barbason, 6-1 Shades Of Love, 7-1 Robo Magic, Kalimet, Prince It Black, 10-1 Brilliant Red, 12-1 others	
LADBROKE ALL-WEATHER TROPHY H'CAP (FINAL) (CLASS B) £13,000 7f	
1.50-10 APOLLO RED (25) (C) G. L. Moore 9.10; Candy Moore 12	
2.00-10 SPEEDY CLASSIC (14) (C) W. J. O'Connor 8.9.11; S. Sanders 4	
3.00-10 CASSOCK COUNT (23) (C) S. Dow 5.9.9; P. Doe (7) 8	
4.00-10 TWIN CREBS (8) (C) V. Smead 7.9; C. Butler 9	
5.00-10 PLAN FOR PROFIT (15) (C) D. J. Johnston 4.9.10; M. McDermott 6	
6.00-10 PALACEGATE TOUCH (14) (C) D. J. Johnston 4.9.10; C. Leathley (5) 9	
7.00-10 REDOUTABLE (10) (C) D. J. Johnston 4.9.10; J. Chapman 7.8.3; A. Callaghan 9	
8.00-10 SALTY JACK (28) (C) V. Smead 4.8.10; R. Parnell 2	
9.00-10 BLUE FLYER (14) (C) R. Hannon 5.8.11; S. Sanders 4	
10.00-10 FAYK (8) (C) A. Hannon 4.8.10; T. Williams 15	
11.00-10 SCUBA RIDGE (14) (C) J. Bridge 6.7.7; S. Sanders 4	
12.00-10 DIPSTICK (28) (C) J. Bridge 8.8.0; D. Hurdell 13	
13.00-10 CHIPSTEAD BAY (28) (C) R. Hannon 4.8.10; M. Dwyer 13	
14.00-10 MR PROFTY (28) (C) W. J. O'Connor 4.8.10; S. Sanders 4	
15.00-10 ALFAMAAL (42) (C) R. Hannon 5.7.7; D. R. McCallan 14	
BETTING: 6-1 Speedy Classic, 7-1 Apollo Red, 8-1 Cassock Count, Palacegate Touch, Redoutable, 10-1 Stoppus Brook, Chipstead Bay, 12-1 others	

Driven to distraction by the sideshows and slideshows that beat the real thing

MIKE
ROWBOTTOMON THE
ALTERNATIVE
ATTRACTIONS

Apparently I've seen Stirling Moss. At Brands Hatch, so my parents always maintained. And when I think hard about it, I do faintly recall a sporting echo from that far-off Sixties Saturday.

Two towers of white paper cups were constructed somewhere behind the backs of the spectating adults, and if my memory serves me well my tower grew bigger than that of my cousin David's before it crashed to the ground.

I believe there was some discussion among the adults about a more public crash that occurred on the other side of the fence, but that was none of our concern. We were not interested in the main attraction.

Alternative attractions are everywhere in the sporting realm - they need only to be not quite looked for. And an aside

is always more interesting than the speech it punctuates.

I was once involved, along with a roomful of other journalists, in a live satellite link-up to interview Nigel Mansell, who was on the other side of the Atlantic preparing to challenge for the Indianapolis 500 title.

We linked before he realised, and our wide screen suddenly transmitted his image as he chatted with his Icam aides about getting the sponsors' names into every interview he was about to undertake. "Got to keep them happy," he said. Most entertaining.

The light snow of publicity which has already fallen on us concerning next month's Winter Olympics in Nagano reminds me of a moment of quiet bliss I enjoyed at the last Games-on-ice.

Once skaters finish scribbling on a rink, and the noise of clapping dies away, there is an interlude which features the quiet but insistent attraction of a tractor-like vehicle which resurfaces the ice.

How to describe the sporadic compulsion of this activity?

When you next turn off the ignition in your car, instead of bundling out towards whatever pressing business awaits you outside its suddenly quiet interior, stop. Just say: Can't be bothered. Sit back. Do nothing. Forget your busy life...

That is how it feels watching the slow, orderly progress of the Zambada, or the Zemboda, or whatever silly name the machinery bears, as it sweeps rhythmically over the distressed ice, smoothing and restoring, smoothing and

restoring... until the fixed-smile scribbling starts up again.

One of the great blessings of actually attending a football match rather than watching it on television is that you don't have to follow the progress of the ball.

That, as we all know, can be a tiresome business. Really being somewhere grants access to more interesting sideways viewing: policemen seeking out offenders who have disappeared into the rolling maul of their fellow troublemakers. Idiots climbing on the stand roofs to get a better view. More safety-conscious spectators set up in overlooking tower blocks, their windows crumpled of neighbors.

Unemployed goalkeepers scuffling about in their areas like bored schoolboys. Stewards in dayglo waistcoats tumbling

over the backs of intent photographers. Spectators sloping out of the director's box ridiculously far ahead of the half-time whistle.

At times, of course, football crowds will turn themselves into an alternative attraction in the form of the Mexican Wave - and woe betide the section of spectators who fail to carry the impulse around the ground.

When you witness the fascist jollity of the Mexican Wave, it gives you a clear message about the quality of the main attraction. It is like when children exclaim about what a delicious, lovely, beautiful yummy meal you have served up rather than taking their knives and forks and tucking in.

The thought of food reminds me of an occasion when I witnessed the ultimate triumph of the alternative at-

traction. The sylvan setting for this revolutionary act was the Hurlingham Club in London SW6.

The first ATP Seniors tournament to be held in Britain had gathered a cluster of beloved names from tennis's recent history. The Nastase, Rod Laver, Roger Taylor, Peter McNamara, uncle Tom Okker and all were on hand to entertain a hand-picked crowd of 600 corporate guests.

But the golden oldies were obliged to kick their heels and fiddle with their racket strings as a traditionally subordinate activity took on an inordinate importance.

Laver and Co were kept waiting nearly an hour while a menu comprising *Soupe de Tomates à la Provençale, Saumon à l'Aneth au Beurre Blanc, Truffes au Chocolat, Café and*

Truffalines et Muscadines was consumed by the chosen not-so-few. Then again, the menu had been prepared by Robert Ross.

But perhaps my favorite recollection of an alternative attraction concerns the colleague whose concentration at the LA Olympic Games of 1984 was completely wrecked when the binoculars with which he was attempting to watch the 1500 metres semi-final randomly alighted on a young woman of such heartbreaking beauty that he could not rest until he had made some form of contact with her.

A mission was directed towards the unsuspecting spectator. A liaison was arranged. Two lives were changed. A case of the alternative attraction being the main attraction all along.

Rafter coping with weight of Australian expectation

The Australian Open gets underway on Monday, and the hosts have a current Grand Slam singles champion to support for the first time since Pat Cash in 1988, when the tournament was transferred from the grass of Kooyong to the rubberised concrete courts of the National Tennis Centre in Melbourne. How will Pat Rafter cope with all the fuss?

While close to comparison with the "classy Aussies" of yesteryear, Rafter is emphatically a character in his own right. That was underlined by the 26-year-old Queenslander's response to the acclaim which followed his triumph last September in succeeding Sampras as the United States Open champion.

"People are thinking that I'm some sort of genius now," Rafter said, "but it's not as if I'm this completely new player - I'm the same old sack of crap I always was."

In which case, full marks for the packaging. Only Sampras, the defending champion, world champion and No 1 in the year-end world rankings for the past five years, is seeded higher than Rafter for the Australian Open men's singles title.

Since returning home for the first time in seven months after the ATP Tour Championship in Hannover in November, Rafter has sampled the interest his victory in New York created Down Under by participating in the Hopman Cup in Perth and in this week's Sydney International ATP Tour event. He was defeated in the semi-finals yesterday by Oxford's Tim Henman, 7-6, 7-5. Monday brings the big one at Melbourne Park, the first Grand Slam tournament of the year.

"Mate, listen. I don't know what to really expect," Rafter said. "I am figuring that it's going to be pretty crazy. Even when I've been 60 or 80 in the

world it's been pretty crazy, pretty difficult to work out. I guess this time it's going to be a little bit more. I'm really looking forward to it. It's going to be a lot of fun. If I could just have a relaxed attitude instead of getting uptight about the whole situation, I think that's most important."

Relaxation is not a problem for Rafter at his second home in Pembroke, Bermuda, where he gets about on a rented moped. Having experienced two years of frustration nursing tennis injuries, one of which caused him to retire during the second round of the 1996 Australian Open - "a blessing in disguise, because I realised by watching everybody else having success how much I wanted it as well" - he is determined to make the most of life.

"It has to be that way, mate, for me to continue to be out here," he said. "Listen, I'm not going to let this success keep me at home all the time so that I can't go out. I don't want to deal with people all the time but I'm going to have to do it. For me to stay normal, I'm going to have to do that. I'm going to continue to do what I love doing, that's enjoy myself off the court as well as on the court."

Is he able to block out all the attention?

"Well, I can't really block it out. I've just got to learn to deal with it. You have to deal with it. It's part of it, and when it gets too much I have to learn to say 'No', in a nice way. I don't like to offend anyone."

A year ago, Rafter and Britain's Greg Rusedski both lost in the first round of the Australian Open. They went on to meet in the final of the US Open. Rafter is currently ranked No 2 in the world. Rusedski No 6. "I think Greg's going to be up there for another couple of years," Rafter said. "First of all, he's got a great serve, everybody knows it. He's a great competitor. He's starting to move very well. You'll see him there for a while."

Rafter also has the highest regard for Henman, the British No 2 currently ranked 19th in the world. "Timmy is potentially a top five player," the Australian said. "He's probably got



Patrick Rafter smiles on his way to victory over Todd Martin in Sydney this week

Photograph: Warren Clarke/Reuters

BY JOHN
ROBERTS

to get a little stronger. When I've played him, he's got every shot behind Sampras, he's probably the next most talented player on the Tour, I think.

"He's got everything, except that bit of strength. That's the only thing I picked up on him, and I think he will work on that. He works hard. He's a great guy, great attitude. He's one of the boys in the locker room, messing around. He knows how to enjoy tennis, and I think that's important. That's his personality, a good guy to hang around."

Unlike Henman and Rusedski and the majority of leading players, Rafter does not travel with a full-time coach, preferring instead to consult Australia's Davis Cup mentors,

John Newcombe and Tony Roche, when he feels the need.

"I think the reason it really does suit me so well is because when I'm practising, first of all, I've got to learn that if I'm on the court, I'm playing the match, and I've got to learn to figure out the match myself. There are times when I feel I might have had habits, but I'm pretty well aware of that at the moment. I'm pretty aware of my game. My game's pretty well moulded."

John McEnroe in his prime travelled without a coach, making telephone calls to Tony Palafox in New York if he needed advice and visiting him at his tennis club if his game needed fine-tuning. "Well, I think Roche and Newcombe are re-

ally good like that," Rafter said. "Sometimes if I feel like something's not going well, I ring them up and talk about it." They are expected to be in close proximity on home territory.

On the last occasion Rafter raised expectations at the Australian Open, in 1995, he advanced to play Andre Agassi in the fourth round. Agassi, the eventual champion, cuffed him, 6-3, 6-4, 6-0.

"I did learn a lot from that," Rafter said. "At the same time, I think Andre was at the top of his game then, and I wasn't playing the best tennis. I struggled through a couple of five-set matches [against Jakob Hlasek and Marcos Ondruska] to get through to the fourth round. I

was pretty lucky to get through there. I guess I wasn't really prepared for that match. I wasn't ready. I wasn't in the same league as Andre, and he showed that. That's what knocked me back down a couple of pegs."

Rafter's renewed confidence and the athleticism of his all-court game has enabled him to delight spectators on every continent. What pleases him most about his game is his improved mobility.

"I've just been able to move and get to nearly every ball," he said. "That's frustrating people. I think, so they're going for more and more, and eventually they're missing. And when I get the right ball, I'm at the net. And before long the umpire is announcing game, set and match.

High rollers sweep in and pollute the memory of Eddie

Big Sunday, with its festival of big waves, is meeting the big money. The mixture does not seem to work.

I was supposed to be going to church. But I succumbed to the ancient pagan rituals on the beach. It was Big Sunday at Waimea Bay. The much trumpeted 25-foot swell finally pulled in to North Shore Grand Central.

Unfortunately, it timed its arrival for midnight. By dawn, it was down to a marginal 20. The "Quiksilver in Memory of Eddie Aikau" big-wave contest, honouring the legendary surfer and heroic Waimea lifeguard, and which stipulates day-long 20-foot-plus conditions, was put back on hold.

This didn't stop about 40 guys paddling out and a huge crowd of spectators watching them at this Coliseum of surfing, as massive breakers rolled in, reared up, and toppled over in a fury of white water.

The air was heady with the optimistic scent of wax, but the beach was littered with broken boards. Two jetskis were fully employed ferrying back in a lot of dreamers. Maybe half of the pack were just there to be able to say, "Yeah, I was there."

Although Waimea retains its mythic status as the holy of holies among North Shore breaks, the Bay was being outgunned by the outer reefs, the cloud-breaks like Phantoms and Revelations, where solid beyond-Eddie-sized waves were breaking all through the afternoon. The Willis Brothers, Michael and Milton, board shapers to the elite big-wave aficionados, were towing in far from the madding Waimea crowd, beyond Backyards, and getting more barrels than a beer truck.

It was too good to last. Before noon, the big money turned up, in the shape of Team Quiksilver. Suddenly, from being Walden Pond with waves, it was more like a Hollywood film set. Two helicopters, a couple of Zodiac boats, nine state-of-the-art waverunners, and about a dozen cameras, not to mention eight or nine of the best surfers in the world, had dropped in to commune with nature.

A lot of the Eddie invitees were there, having flown in from other islands, California and Australia to be here for the big day. But the fact is that the Willis Brothers, North Shore veterans who haven't been given a shot by Quiksilver, were more than matching them, wave for wave. One of the Quiksilver

crew, being paid a bundle just to be there, took off on a particularly heavy wave, but pumped for the shoulder, while Milton Willis aimed straight for the most dangerous core of the wave and made it out again.

There was one big name who didn't even come close and didn't go back out after lunch. Local knowledge and experience were pre-eminent. But when the pictures and the video came out, I guarantee it won't look that way: global media expertise will win out.

That episode dramatised what has become the problem with the Quiksilver contest: its selection procedure. This is the only contest of its kind in the world, and merely to be in it, let alone win it, is a massive status symbol. And yet the criteria by which the invitations are handed out remain clouded in secrecy. Just as at Waimea on Sunday, of the 24 full-on contestants and their 24 alternates, maybe only 50 per cent would be beyond dispute. As for the other 50 per cent, it is possible to imagine other names, with a greater claim.

The truth that almost no one in Hawaii dares to speak is that the winners of the only two previous completed contests over the last few years are likewise compromised. The first winner - Clyde Aikau - is the brother of Eddie. The second, Keone Downing, is the son of George, the director of the whole event. While both these surfers may indeed have surfed the most radical waves on the day, the fact that they took part left alone went on to win has aroused suspicion. To put the case at its least sensational, selecting and judging are insufficiently transparent: justice is not being seen to be done.

"The whole thing is a sham" is Milton Willis' more dramatic way of putting it. "The concept is fantastic. I don't question the idealism or the memory of Eddie. But let's take the sheepskin off the wolf here - people are being duped."

Quiksilver sportswear stand to make an immense amount of money out of this event, even though it happens so rarely. The North Shore is quick to criticise what they see as minimum investment, maximum hype.

Tellingly, two of Quiksilver's living legends are flying out to Australia, despite promising lows stacking up all the way to Alaska. One of the sceptics spoke for a large constituency when he said that "Word is they don't want to have any part of the monster swell that's coming."

Big business and big waves don't mix.

ANDY
MARTIN
NEWS
FROM
THE
NORTH
SHORE

Henman manages to hold off Australia's new hero

Tim Henman yesterday recorded one of the best wins of his career in beating the world No 2, Pat Rafter of Australia, in straight sets to reach the Sydney International final for the second successive year.

Henman won 7-6, 7-5 and will now meet the Slovakian Karol Kucera, who came from behind to beat Michael Tebbutt 4-6, 7-6, 6-0. Henman traded four breaks of serve with the US Open winner from 1-1 in the first

set before the set went into a tie-break, which he won 7-5. At the start of the second set, however, Rafter broke Henman's serve and at one stage led 4-2. But the British No 2 broke back to level at 4-4 before squandering his first match point at 4-5.

Henman held on and earned two more match points two games later and although Rafter was able to save the first, on the second he volleyed a return out to give Henman victory.

Henman said afterwards: "I'm very pleased to have beaten Pat Rafter in front of his home fans. With him being US Open champion and No 2 in the world it's a big win for me, and it's a big boost to my confidence going into the Australian Open."

Henman never allowed Rafter to settle into any sort of rhythm and he admitted the quality of his returns won him the match. "I would say perhaps I could have served a little bit

more consistently, but at the end of the day I won and that's the most important thing."

Henman is unseeded for the first Grand Slam of the year, but has high hopes of going far in a tournament which he exited at the third-round stage 12 months ago. "I'm pretty happy with the way things are going. I couldn't have any complaints whether I win or lose tomorrow, so it's a good way to come into a Grand Slam," he said.

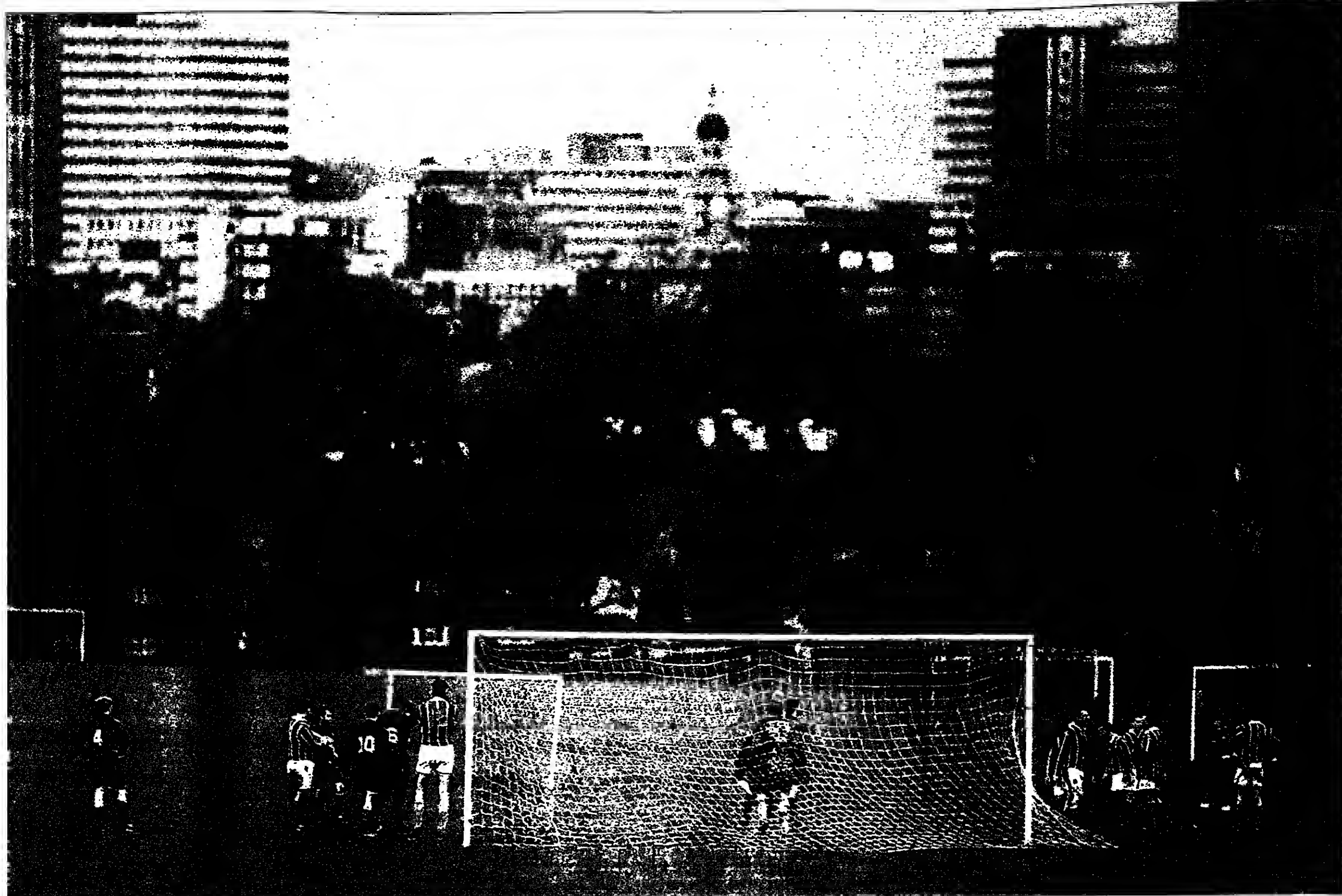
Henman has been drawn to face a qualifier in the first round of the Australian Open, as is the British No 1, Greg Rusedski, who is seeded five.

Rusedski also won yesterday, beating Austria's Thomas Muster 6-3, 7-6 in the Kooyong Classic. The win was Rusedski's first in three matches at the event, in which he, Pete Sampras and Muster were reduced to the consolation group. Sampras, however, slumped to his second

defeat in three days, losing 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, to Andrei Medvedev. Mark Philippoussis won a three-set battle with Gustavo Kuerten to reach today's final of the tournament, where he will play Andre Agassi.

Venus Williams reached the Sydney International final, beating Japan's Ai Sugiyama 6-1, 7-6, but an all-Williams final was not to be, her sister, Serena, losing 6-2, 6-1 to Arantxa Sanchez Vicario.

18/PHOTOSHOOT



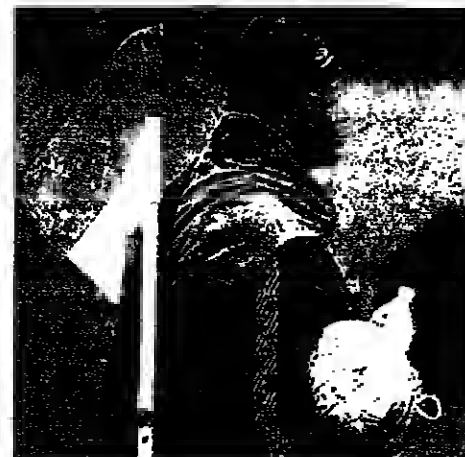
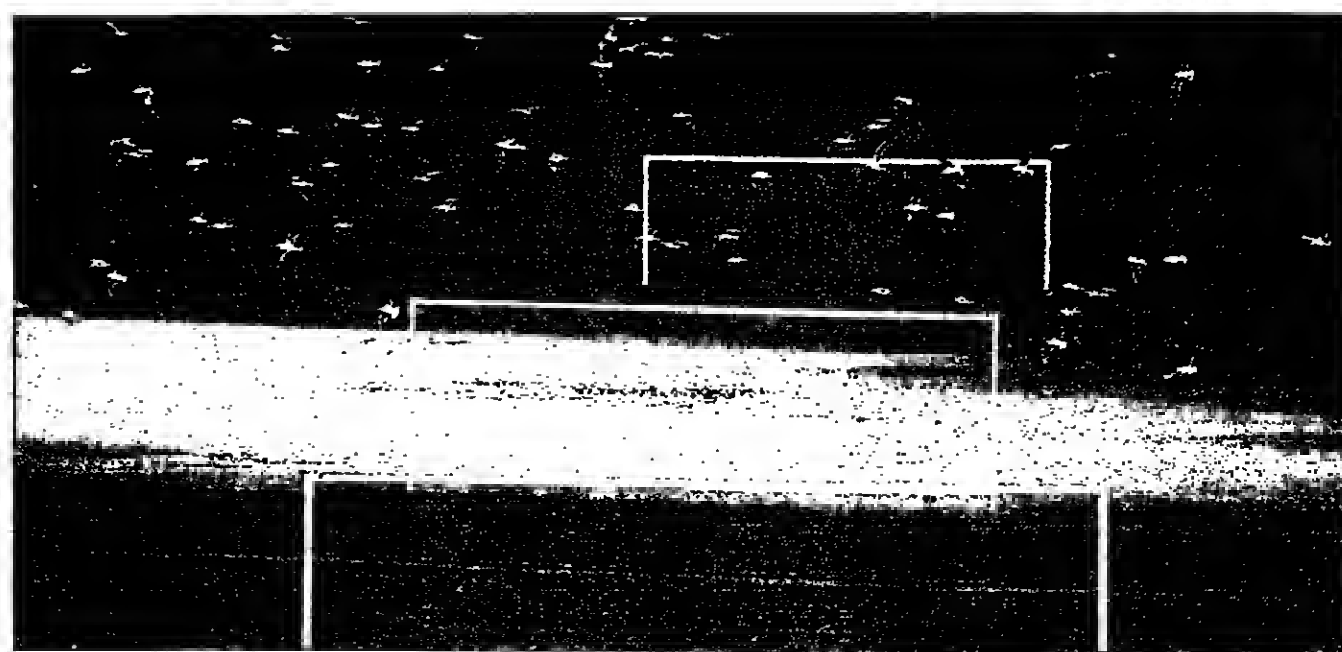
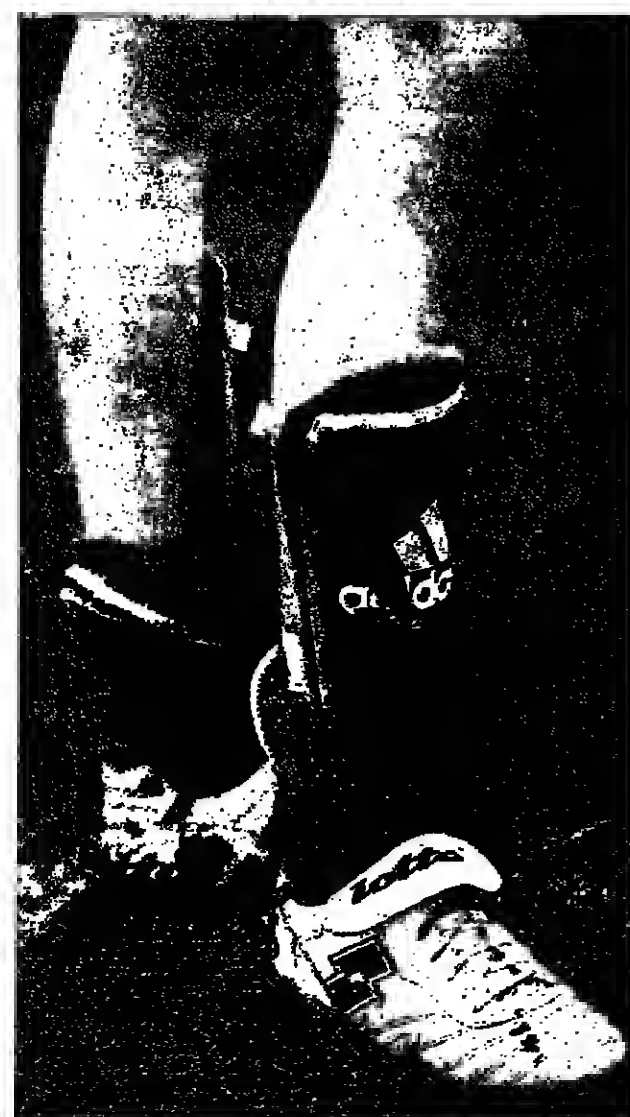
Park life pleasures on the fields of dreams

On Saturdays and Sundays throughout the winter the dreams, fantasies, aspirations and frustrations of men and women of all shapes, sizes, creeds and religions are played out on the parks football pitches of Britain. There are over 42,000 clubs affiliated to the Football Association in England alone and only 89 of them are professional, so for the vast majority it is a pitch like this that is home for the day. It was on a pitch like this that John Barnes was spotted by Watford, playing for Sunbury Court and no doubt dreaming of the day he would run through the entire Brazilian defence to score at the Maracana Stadium. And of course it was a pitch like this at Hackney Marshes, famous the world over as a parks venue, that Kenny Dalglish had in mind when he issued his FA Cup challenge to Stevenage Borough.

In its heyday Hackney Marshes housed 130 pitches side by side – today there are 88. As two teams come off two more go on, with well over 100 club matches taking place on a typical Sunday. It was there that Terry Venables played his schools football, more recently David Beckham and just about any footballer from London will have played at Hackney Marshes at some time in their youth. The St John Ambulance is always on hand and at many of the other parks venues up and down the country, while scouts from the professional clubs patrol the touchlines looking for the next John Barnes. But with 5,000 sports grounds sold for development to the private sector since 1981, the now 34-year-old Barnes may not be the only endangered species in British football.

— Adam Szreter

PHOTOGRAPHS
BY PETER JAY



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Travelling man Ward strikes camp at battling Barnsley

After a transfer, an operation, fatherhood and house-moving problems, Ashley Ward was hoping for a more stable 1997 with Derby County.

It did not work out like that. The striker has been hit for sixes and sevens, and not just while playing for his latest club, Barnsley. He has also suffered from meningitis. But, despite last week's thrashing by West Ham, Glenn Moore found him still in an upbeat mood.

Last April Ashley Ward sat back in the bath in the visitor's dressing-room at Old Trafford and thought contentedly "I bet this won't happen very often". Manchester United had just been beaten at home and Ward, a Manchester City supporter as a boy, had scored in Derby County's surprise victory.

Six months later he went back to Old Trafford, this time with Barnsley. As he recalled this week, "normal service was resumed". Barnsley were beaten 7-0.

Such a scoreline has become as much a feature of Barnsley's season as United's, only Barnsley usually have the "nil". Last week they were beaten 6-0 by West Ham United and, as with the 5-0 at Arsenal and 6-0 at home to Chelsea, the sages nodded and said "I knew they were out of their depth".

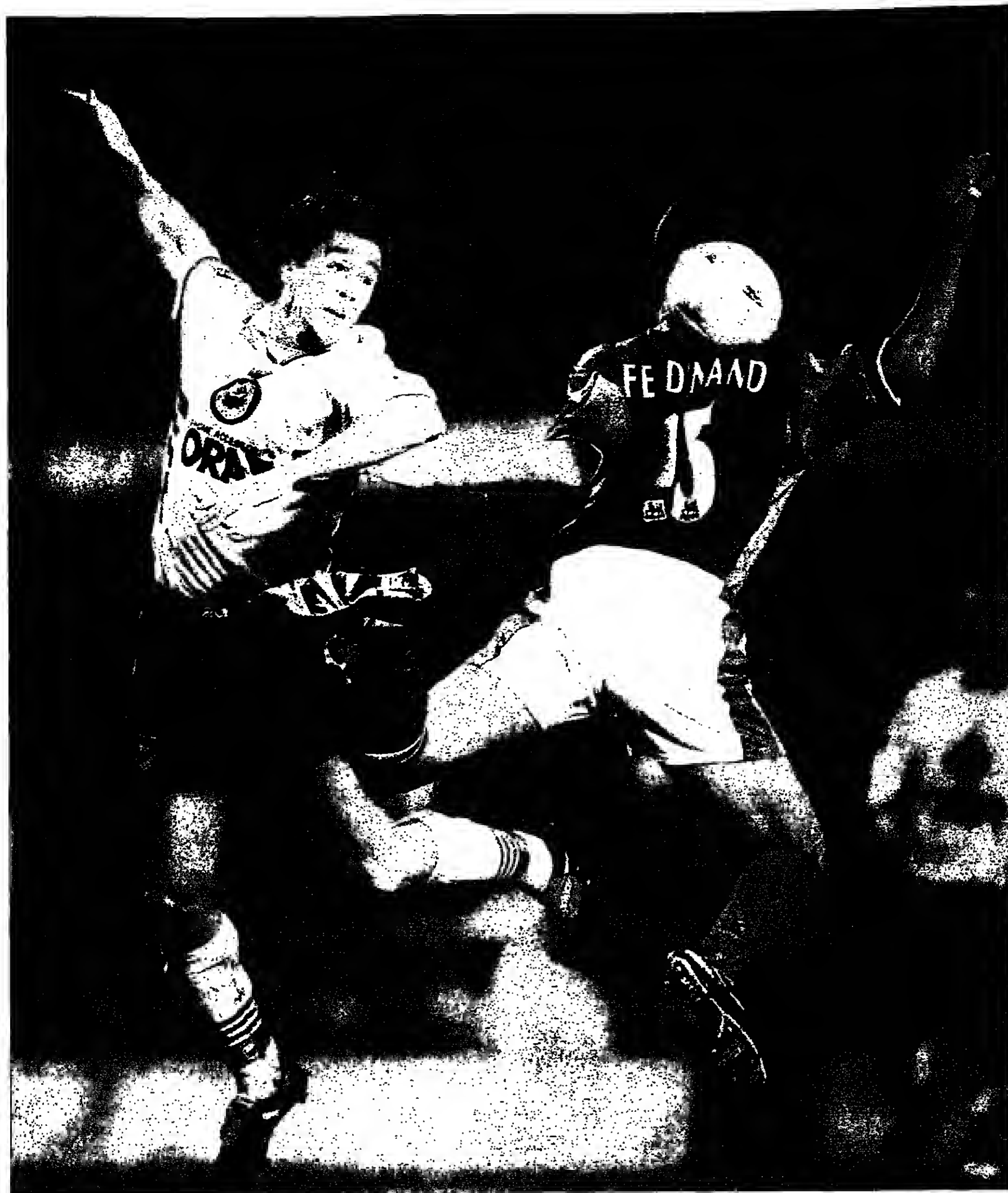
Yet Barnsley are still only two points adrift at the bottom and five points behind today's opponents at Oakwell, Crystal Palace, who occupy the last safety position.

"We've had some good performances, especially at home," Ward said, "that's why we are still in with a shout. If we beat Palace we go two points behind them and most of the teams in the bottom half have got to come to our place [only Coventry, of the bottom nine, are still to play Barnsley at home].

"I knew it would be tough when I joined, everyone did, but we were starting to get it right. We had a terrible time at Tottenham [0-3], but apart from that we were doing well. Ade Moses and Arjan de Zeeuw were getting it together at the back and we had conceded one goal in the last three games, which was pretty good considering the way they've been going in. But Ade and Arjan were suspended last Saturday [against West Ham], we had to bring in two new lads, one making a debut, the other playing his second game, and we got hammered again."

The new pairing were not the only ones at fault and it would have been pretty quiet in the away dressing-room at Upton Park had Danny Wilson not been dishing out a major bollocking. "The gaffer was furious," Ward said. "It was a bad performance."

"It is difficult to lift yourself afterwards, it's humiliating. Professionals are not used to it. From an early age they have usually played in the better teams and it's not often people get whacked in the Premiership."



Fighting spirit: Barnsley's Ashley Ward shows his commitment to the Barnsley cause during last week's heavy defeat at West Ham United

Photograph: Allsport

I put it to Ward, by way of consolation, that some of us have suffered 6-0 stuffings at regular intervals in our footballing life, but he responds, gently but with feeling: "It doesn't matter when you're playing for the Lion and Lamb. This is our livelihood."

Ward's ability to earn that livelihood was threatened last autumn when he was diagnosed as suffering from meningitis. The prospect of not being able to play football was the least of his worries as he waited for the results of the tests.

"It was frightening," he said. "The first few days they didn't know what type it was - the other type's a killer. My health is fine now, but I was ill for a week or so, then had to do nothing for a month. That was frustrating, especially as I had

just gone to a new club. It was similar to when I went to Derby and needed a groin operation almost immediately."

When we last met in December 1996, Ward was striking up a good partnership with Dean Sturridge as

Derby settled well in their first season back in the top flight. He ended the season with a reasonable eight goals from 25 starts and retained his place for the current campaign, but in September Jim Smith called him into his office.

"I was playing every game, but Jim told me an offer had come in and it was up to me. That more or less makes your mind up for you. Derby had earlier said they would not sell Dean for £5m but they were prepared to let me go for rather less than a fortune (£1.3m, rising to £1.55m if Barnsley stay up), so it was obviously time to move on."

"I didn't want to risk being in reserves. Jim's always looking to the foreign market and he'd brought in Paulo Wanchope and Francesco Baliano as well as Dean Burton."

It was time for his sixth club in total and fourth in three years. "When I spoke to Danny I wasn't sure, but it's worked out great for me. I love it here. The supporters have been fantastic, the best I've come across. They've never once turned on the team, maybe they appreciate the difficulty of the task, but not every crowd would."

Most of Ward's moves have been at his employers' instigation and there have been reports that he may be sold if Barnsley are relegated. "You never know, but I'd like to stay here," he said.

The liking for Barnsley is partly because he has been able to move back to his native Manchester and, after years of housing problems caused by his regular transfers, he will shortly be moving into a converted barn which has been rebuilt by his father-in-law. With a second daughter due next month it will not be a moment too soon.

The first daughter was named Darby less than a month before he moved from Norwich City to Derby two years ago. "I've already had a few comments, but we won't be naming her after a football team," he said.

Ward, who has managed five goals in 18 matches for Barnsley, including very satisfying winners against Liverpool (at Anfield) and Derby, may have a new partner today. Norway's Jan Age Fjortoft was signed from Sheffield United for £800,000 on Thursday.

"I assume he's support for me but you never know," Ward said. "It should be enjoyable playing with him. He's got experience, scores a few goals and is a big lad, so I won't have to challenge for every high ball now."

Three of the Premiership bottom four were promoted last year and three of the First Division's top four relegated which would suggest the gap is getting ever bigger.

"There is a gap. One problem for us is that teams down with us like Tottenham can bring in players like Klinsmann and Bertl. There's no way we can do that - they may be on free transfers, but the wages are beyond us. The teams that have just come up struggle with injuries. We don't have the depth, not just in numbers but in quality."

"The speed of thought is a big difference. If you are pulled out of position in the Premiership someone goes in the space, in the First Division you can get away with it. People make better runs. You don't get as many goal chances either, for every chance you get at Barnsley you would probably get three for United or Liverpool. But I knew that when I signed."

You've just got used to a player when suddenly he's off

Among the many snippets of information I've gleaned in recent weeks from the pages of this newspaper was one telling me that the Portuguese striker Paulo Alves had returned home after a loan spell with West Ham. In essence, it wasn't a particularly spectacular nugget of information: Alves had made such little impact at Upton Park that I (and, I suspect, many Hammers fans) had forgotten he'd even arrived in the first place.

But that's the loan deals for you. In my opinion the loan - or temporary transfer as they like to call it - is a strange beast. It's as integral to our game as the penalty shoot-out, yet it can be as infuriatingly unsatisfactory.

For every player who has a loan deal to thank for kick-starting his career (Brett Angell hadn't managed to score for Sunderland when he went on loan to Sheffield United, West Brom and finally Stockport, where his goals earned him a permanent contract), there's another for whom getting farmed out on loan is essentially a passport to obscurity (Shaun Teale, an England possibility just a few seasons ago, went on loan from Tranmere to Preston last February and little has been heard of him since).

And for fans, loan deals can be maddening. I mean, you've just got used to a player when suddenly he's off without so much as a "so long and thanks for the memories" (if there are any; some deals last no longer than a month).

Take Alves' compatriot Hugo Porfiri. His skills made him a cult figure during his loan spell at West Ham, yet the Hammers couldn't match the pesetas on offer for him.

Not that it bothered Harry Redknapp much. He says Porfiri "did a good job for us at the time", and claims loans are "a great idea. You get a player on loan for a few months, he tries his heart out to win himself a contract and you just pay his wages while you get to have a good long look at him."

But he wishes he'd got Marco Boegers, Paulo Futre and Florin Raducioiu on loan before shelling out the best part of £5m for them.

Still, the West Ham manager has other reasons for advocating loans. If it were up to him he'd farm out every kid, to broaden their horizons as well as their skills. Most recently, Rio Ferdinand sampled life on the South Coast at Bournemouth while Frank Lampard Jr went to Swansea; both returned better - and



OLIVIA BLAIR ON THE INADEQUACIES OF THE LOAN SYSTEM

(supposedly) more mature players - for the experience.

Redknapp says: "You don't get the same experiences playing reserve-team football where it's a mix of slightly soured seniors and youngsters trying for their lives. First-team football is a different ball-game altogether, plus they don't get pampered in the lower divisions. They might get a cup of tea, but you can forget the laundry and the boots cleaned. It's character building, if nothing else."

Alex Ferguson would no doubt agree. He's made a habit of farming out his fledg-

lings, among them Terry Cooke (to Sunderland and Birmingham), Michael Appleton (to Lincoln and Grimsby) and Ben Thornley (to Huddersfield and Stockport). Even David Beckham was loaned to Preston.

Similarly, Newcastle sent Darren Huckerby on loan to Millwall, but their hand was rather forced since Kevin Keegan had disbanded the reserves at St James' Park and Huckerby wasn't playing any football at all.

But for all a loan deal benefits a young player and is useful to a manager as a precursor to a permanent signing, loans are arranged, more often than not, to get a club out of a spot of bother. Call me a cynic, but I can't see Jürgen Klinsmann staying at Spurs beyond May. Spurs say they've signed him until the end of the season; I say it's just a glorified loan deal. And will Tomas Brodin really stay in London SE25 when the season ends, particularly if it means playing First Division football? I think not.

Over in Europe, of course, clubs can sign as many players as they want on loan and those players are even allowed to play against the club holding their registration. (In France, they have a "joker" system

whereby clubs can apply to sign a player on loan at any time of the season - even outside the transfer windows - when a crisis seems it necessary. In other words, when they can make a good case for doing so.

But then in most European leagues there is greater fluidity of movement between the divisions: our top clubs are more self-interested. Football Association rules decree that Premier League clubs cannot conduct loans deals between themselves, except in the case of goalkeepers, and only then when the circumstances are "extenuating".

So, loans can only be conducted between Premier League and Nationwide League clubs, and each club can only sign two players on loan at any one time up to a maximum of five per season. (That latter figure has increased this season, so if it seems to you - as it does to me - that there are more and more loan deals nowadays, then you'd be right).

Which means that the temporary transfer is here to stay, in its many shapes and forms. Still, I have to admit that for all my dislike of it, were anyone to lend us a full-back or a ball-winning midfielder (and I'm speaking as a Spurs fan here), I wouldn't say no.

Why earache is Semitic soccer's biggest headache

The date: 14 April, 1974. The place: Mitcham Common. (Twenty-four Jewish lads south of the river? This is tantamount to Yasser Arafat praying at the Western Wall). The occasion: the final of The Referees' Invitation Trophy, Jewish football's premier cup competition, making the choice of the venue even more bizarre. We all came from Hendon and Edgware.

Our opponents were Athletic Neasden, the kings of Semitic soccer, unbeaten in three seasons. Until now. We beat them one-nil on penalties. The first 10 penalties were all missed - or saved - so the referee, eager as we were to get back for lunch, moved the spot forward by two feet (but to you, three). Neasden missed kick number 11, we scored the next, and I lifted the trophy, presented in a blaze of flashbulbs by a kosher butcher from Finchley.

We were Bar Kochba FC, the "ch" pronounced the Scottish way, as in ooh aye, named after a Jewish revolutionary who, it is rumoured, was the first Biblical character to wear moulded studs.

We played in the Maccabi Sunday League, where all teams had to be all-Jewish. Now this gave rise to a number of problems, but one in

particular. Jews aren't physical, we argue. You get no real injuries in Jewish football - just earache. So what we did was this. We signed a ringer, a hard man, a non-Jew, a player who was not only out above ability-wise, but one who could put himself about a bit. In a team of Hoddles we wanted a Hunter (that's Norman, not Hillman). Our ringer was Stevie Prince. No one knows for sure why he wanted to play for us. We were to football what Woody Allen is to baby-sitting.

FAN'S EYE VIEW NO 240 BAR KOCHBA FC BY PETER MOSS

But I do know he liked the name Bar Kochba. He thought it was a pub in Poland.

Stevie Prince - or Sheldon Pinkus, the name adopted for registration - was a great asset. But he did have to be over so circumspect in the changing-room when the other team were about, him being the odd man out in an otherwise forskin-free zone.

Most of our team were estate agents - that's just the way it worked out - so we

knew how to pick a home ground. No Hackney Marshes for us; even Wormwood Scrubs became passé once we made our move to Hampstead Heath Extension, a particularly Jewish area of north London. (It would be. Who but a Jew would take a place like Hampstead Heath and add an extension?)

It was a pleasure to get sent off on the Extension, if only to have a little more time to admire the ornate mansions - one of which was home to Elizabeth Taylor - that abutted our hallowed turf. Once, the referee, senior partner at the firm of surveyors where I did my articles, sent me off for arguing with him over the value of a house that backed on to our pitch. Only in Jewish football!

Bar Kochba exist today only as a memory. I still see many of the lads: some of them I play five-a-side with, and Radlett Ralph I meet across the tennis net down at the David Lloyd. But not Stevie. So Stevie, if you're reading this, and you need a flying winger ringer for your goyische team, call me. I'm no Ryan Giggs, but God knows I can talk the opposition into near terminal somnolence. And what's more, my mum still makes a mean salt beef sandwich!



Saturday 17 January 1998

World Cup organisers launch crackdown on ticket touts

The World Cup organisers will take firm action to stop any unauthorised trade in tickets for this summer's tournament. Nick Harris reports.

The French Organising Committee for the World Cup (CFO) will take all measures necessary to ensure that tickets for the tournament are sold according to its rules.

As *The Independent* revealed yesterday, World Cup tickets are being advertised - particularly on the Internet - by unauthorised agents. A CFO spokeswoman said yesterday: "If we have evidence that tickets are bought through unauthorised sources, we will stop the tickets."

Tickets will not be distributed until late in May and the CFO's most effective method of stopping a black market will be simply not to issue tickets where it can prove they are part of an unauthorised trade.

The CFO hopes this will encourage fans only to buy through authorised operators. If they buy via unauthorised sources, they risk either buying a ticket they will not receive or one they might not be able to use.

In cases where the CFO believes that tickets have been bought on the black market, it may organise random identity checks on match days. Fans in possession of such tickets will risk being refused entry.

The spokeswoman said that, in the meantime, the CFO would

investigate all instances around the world where unauthorised trade is suspected. *The Independent* reported yesterday that an unofficial American-based agency, 24/7 Ticket Service, is offering to sell via the Internet tickets it claims are provided by FIFA-approved operators.

The spokeswoman said: "Fifa and the CFO are investigating all reports of tickets being sold on the Internet and through unauthorised sources at inflated prices. We are taking this very seriously."

The CFO said that anyone found selling tickets suspected of being unauthorised would be asked to prove their sources. If they are found to be contravening CFO rules, they will be warned to stop. If they persist, the CFO hopes to take legal action to stop them. "Our lawyers are looking, country by country, to see what action we can take as soon as possible," the spokeswoman said.

The CFO has already taken action against a company in France which was advertising

that it was buying and selling tickets. The CFO stopped the trade by asking a newspaper to stop carrying the agent's advertisements and by threatening the agent with legal action. The CFO said it was also looking into other similar cases in France.

The organisers also clarified yesterday precisely how many tickets are available for each game and how they will be allocated. Around 61 per cent of the stadiums' net capacities have been allocated to French fans, 20 per cent to Fifa (for

competing teams' fans and national federations), 12 per cent to sponsors (around a third of these being for French sponsors) and around seven per cent to Fifa-approved tour operators.

The CFO also pointed out that the number of tickets actually available during the World Cup is considerably fewer than has been widely reported.

England's opening game, for example, on 15 June against Tunisia, takes place in the

60,000-capacity Stade Vélodrome in Marseille. The capacity for World Cup games, however, will be 50,000 at most and possibly less.

This is because the media platform for journalists and TV cameras takes up the space of 8,000 seats, up to 1,000 seats have been set aside for VIP use, and other seats will not be used because their view will be obscured for a variety of reasons (including TV cameras).

World Cup tickets on the Internet, page 20

Shearer poised to make comeback

There was good news for Newcastle and England supporters yesterday when Kenny Dalglish announced that Alan Shearer was ready to return to action. Carl Little reports.

Kenny Dalglish, the Newcastle manager, has promised to make a "responsible" decision on Alan Shearer's fitness before today's game with Bolton at St James' Park.

Dalglish yesterday revealed that Shearer had completed a full training session without suffering any adverse reaction to his injuries and would be considered for selection.

The England striker has been out since damaging ankle ligaments in the Umbro tournament at Goodison Park last July.

"Alan is in consideration. He's done everything expected of him in training," Dalglish said. "He's gone through all the extensive routines he has to go

through and has shown no reaction to his injuries. There was just a little bit of soreness after Tuesday's practice match."

Shearer is poised to make his comeback, but Dalglish stressed that he would not take risks with his £15m striker. "We'll make a decision on Alan as responsible men," he said. "We're not going to be stupid but he's done very well in training and I repeat - he's in consideration."

At Shearer's old club, Blackburn Rovers, manager Roy Hodgson has made a surprise £6m bid for the Italian striker Pierluigi Casiraghi. Hodgson is waiting for a reply from Lazio about an inquiry on the table, that could now be activated, to bring Casiraghi to Ewood Park.

Lazio are trying to tie up a £13m deal for Chilean striker Marcelo Salas, once a Manchester United target, with his club River Plate this weekend, which Hodgson hopes will mean that Casiraghi will be available.

A medical stands between Faustino Asprilla and a move from Newcastle back to Parma. The fee, believed to be just over

£6m, has been agreed and the deal seems likely to be completed over the weekend.

Sasa Curcic's proposed move to the Turkish club Besiktas has broken down, at least until the summer. The Aston Villa midfielder, signed from Bolton Wanderers 18 months ago, had been in Istanbul for talks with Besiktas' coach, John Toshack.

Rund Gullit has asked Fifa, the game's world governing body, to help stop his players missing vital Premiership games through international games. The Chelsea manager's squad could be depleted by friendlies and training camps leading up to the World Cup, and Gullit is hoping for some give and take.

"We are still arguing to keep our players here," he said. "They earn their money here. Their priorities must be here. I'm not at war with Fifa. I just want to explain the situation and I hope I can rely on a bit of compassion."

Sam Hammam, the Wimbledon chairman, has asked for patience from Dons supporters after a plan to move the club to a new purpose-built venue near their old Plough Lane ground fell through. Problems with capacity, parking, layout and feasibility have caused the club to go back to the drawing board.

"If a suitable site exists, then I'm confident the council will help us find it and make it work," Hammam said.

The French goalkeeper Bernard Lama is back at West Ham after failing to secure a move to a club in France and is now set to stay for the rest of the season. Lama is unhappy that he has not been given a chance after joining the Hammers on loan and returned home last week to try to find first-team football in order to keep his World Cup hopes alive.

Premiership preview, page 23



Michael Atherton, the England captain, glances a boundary as the winter tour gets under way against Jamaica at Montego Bay yesterday. Report, page 17; Photograph: Laurence Griffiths/Emphas

Middlesbrough agree £4m fee for unsettled Dublin

Middlesbrough have agreed a £4m fee with Coventry for striker Dion Dublin, after he turned down a £3m contract at Highfield Road worth £16,000 a week on Tuesday.

Viv Anderson, Boro's assistant manager, said: "Dublin is a good player who can play in several positions. We have agreed a fee but there is a long way to go before he walks in the door. It is not hard and fast he will sign for us. Transfer talks have not started with the player. We are hoping to hear something in the next 48 hours."

Wimbledon, Crystal Palace and Leicester have also been linked with the former United striker - with Palace already having had a £3.25m bid rejected.

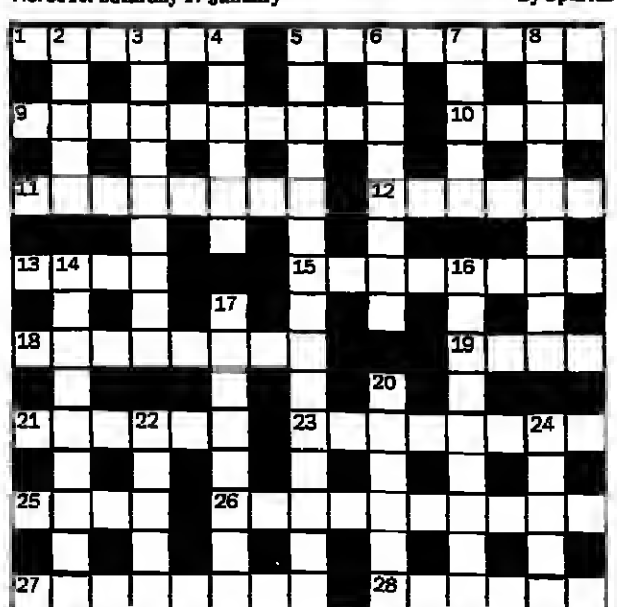
Gordon Strachan, the Coventry manager, refused to confirm Dublin's imminent departure, saying yesterday: "He is in our team against Arsenal and he will captain the side."

"He is playing as well as he ever has and our relationship is extremely good. I would like to think that this is not his farewell match. I expect him to be here for as long as we can keep him,"

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3510, Saturday 17 January

By Spuria



Friday's solution

Last Saturday's solution

ACROSS
1 University students found penning Greek letter difficult (6)
5 Improvement achieved in theatre by taking out a few lines (4-4)
9 Quaintly picturesque elder wood left to grow (1-6)
10 Hint of orange in Benedictine spells ruin (4)
11 Large Latin American community not in favour of tucking into milk pudding (8)
12 Everyone comes round night before exam (1-5)
13 Record shows island's in care of District Commissioner (4)
15 One's in a splint having suffered uncontrolled descent (8)
18 Disease present in grape, all shrivelled up (8)
19 What was on at the Coliseum - The Robe? (4)
21 Let's do something with your hair! (6)
23 Go abroad - maybe Kuwait, around head of Gulf (8)
25 Young girl having a month in France and Germany (4)
26 Reported sick first - that's foolish (3-7)
27 Spray making one moister, possibly? (8)
28 Team still to go by overhead railroad (6)

DOWN
2 Old US President introducing a measure originally from Europe? (5)
3 Ad one client pulled in his, all the same (9)
4 Thing for scrubbing lavatory, note (6)
5 Left-wing sympathiser and Roman chap changing places (6-9)
6 Old man's beard held in by elastic, roughly a metre (8)
7 Deposit daughter's carried in box (5)
8 Efflorescence running across East River (9)
14 In final stage of game tangle turns ugly (9)
16 Poisoned funerary receptacle in oriental grave (9)
17 Personal boosters, say, initially optimising effects of drugs? (3-5)
20 Duke's involved in race round day centre (6)
22 Means of communication whereby doctor gets medicine sent up (5)
24 Subject English master's included in article (5)

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RUGBY UNION

Yates' legal team pushes for delay in ear-biting hearing

Lawyers representing Kevin Yates, the Bath prop suspended pending further investigations into last weekend's ear-biting scandal, are attempting to delay next week's eagerly awaited disciplinary hearing.

Chris Hewett says that whatever the timing, the West Country club are determined to get at the truth.

The barrack room lawyers who inhabit every rugby clubhouse in the land may have to wait longer than they think for a solution to the Great Bath Ear-Biting Mystery. The legal team representing the prime suspect, Kevin Yates, say they have been given insufficient time to prepare their defence and are pushing for a postponement of the internal hearing scheduled for Tuesday.

Yates, the 26-year-old loose-head prop capped twice by England in Argentina last summer, was one of three Bath front-rowers cited for foul play by London

Scottish after Simon Fenn, the Exiles' flanker, suffered a serious injury to his left ear during a cup tie at the Recreation Ground a week ago. Yates' fellow prop, Victor Ubogu, was cleared by Scottish on Wednesday and yesterday, the same officials publicly exonerated Federico Mendez, the third member of the triumvirate.

If the Londoners expected Bath to greet the news with a fanfare of trumpets, they were mistaken. "It is up to them to decide if apologies are in order," said Tony Swift, the Bath chief executive. "I've no idea why they felt the need to cite all three players. We've collected evidence from both sides and there has not been a mention of either Mendez or Ubogu, but we're not prepared to get into a slanging match over it. This is not a game to be won, a competition to see who can issue the best press release."

"I can only describe the last few days as horrific. People have been baying for action and believe me, I would love to get to the truth of the matter; get it sorted and get on with running this rugby club. However, it's going to be far more difficult to reach that stage than anyone imagined in the two or three days following the

alleged incident. I promise you, it's not an easy situation."

The tribunal will be chaired by an independent legal expert and made up of two club directors, neither of whom will have been involved in the investigation, and two club members, almost certainly players, of his own choosing.

London Scottish said in a statement that Fenn is making a good recovery under the circumstances "but has suffered a temporary loss of hearing in his left ear. Understandably, he has been further upset and depressed by the outrageous comments made by Philip Bliss."

Bliss, honorary surgeon to the Bath club but not one of the medical staff on duty last week, suggested that Fenn's injuries might not have been caused by a bite. Yesterday, Swift continued to distance the club from their own medic's point of view.

● The unions of France, Scotland, Ireland and Wales confirmed in Paris yesterday that Italy should be invited to participate in the championship from 1999-2000. The Rugby Football Union will make their decision at their next council meeting on 20 February.

ELEVEN PAGES OF SPORT BEGIN ON PAGE 14

IN MONDAY'S 20-PAGE SPORTS SECTION

THE MONDAY INTERVIEW
Chris Sutton talks to Ian Staffor about life back at the top

Chris Hewett watches Jeremy Guscott return to the fray as Bath take on Newcastle

Phil Shaw reports on the draw for the qualifying groups of the European Championship

مكتبة الامم

PERSONAL FINANCE, PROPERTY & MOTORING

Saturday 17 January 1998



ED MARY WILSON
Straw roofs are hot stuff

[illegible]



**NIC
CICUTTI**

PERSONAL FINANCE JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR

Few people would describe me as a war fiend, but if there is one thing I am enjoying at present, it is the open warfare between financial services providers, all competing for their rivals' customers.

Earlier this week, Halifax announced it is to open a 24-hour telephone-based savings account. Premium Savings Direct. The account offers instant access to funds up to twice a year and will pay from 7.3 per cent gross on deposits over £10,000, rising to 7.85 per cent gross on above £40,000. Standard Life, the mutual insurer, launched its high-interest account last week.

Meanwhile, both Scottish Amicable, the former mutual insurer taken over last year by Prudential, and First Direct, the telephone-based financial provider, this week launched separate versions of low-cost pension plans.

Without going into detail on the charges, which come in below many of their competitors, what unites them is their willingness to face the fact that people are likely to halt contributions into personal pensions for perfectly sensible reasons.

Consequently, Direct Line and ScotAm are promising not to penalise customers if they halt contributions early. They are saying that if policyholders switch a personal pension to another scheme in the first few years of its life, the "transfer value" paid out will reflect far more closely than before the amount actually paid in.

This is both unremarkable and astonishing. Unremarkable

because it has taken so long for many insurers to react to the challenge from their telephone-based rivals, who have followed this strategy for several years. Astonishing, because ScotAm had tried desperately to hold the line against this development.

In fact, it even went so far a few years ago as to try to construct a "Resistance Front" (a secret cartel, actually) against high transfer values—

to no avail, as it now turns out. What we are seeing, both with savings and pensions, is a cold new dawn, as some established players (far too few for now) realise that, to maintain their grip on the market, they will have to deliver competitively priced products. One by-product of this is that the old high street-based branch system will be weakened.

Bank and building society staff will be sacked in their thousands over the next few years. But the reality is that this would have happened anyway, and there's not much we can do about it purely as consumers. What we can do is extract the best possible price out of their war.

On a separate note, Barclaycard has issued an eight point checklist for customers in financial difficulties after the Xmas and January spending spree. Its advice might be a tad more credible had it not also run a huge "Don't Put It Off. Put It On" TV advertising campaign throughout December, coupled with advice to cardholders to skip that month's credit card payment.

MONEY MAKEOVER

How to bridge a future gap in income

Name: Colin and Sarah Chadfield
Ages: 43 and 26
Occupations: Fire Brigade officer and Fire Brigade controller

The problem: Colin and Sarah, from North Yorkshire, have a 13-month-old son, George. Colin, who joined the service in 1981, earns about £34,000 while Sarah, who joined in 1992, earns about £17,000.

Both are members of their occupational pension scheme, which provides an inflation-proofed pension based on a multiple of income against their years of service. But although Colin will receive a maximum pension if he stays with the service until retirement, Sarah is contemplating reducing her hours. Another option might be to give up work temporarily to care for George.

They also have some windfall shares from Halifax and Norwich Union and an investment in a Co-op six-year bond, which should pay out any increase in the FTSE 100 index plus 25 per cent at maturity in 2000.

Their greatest concerns are how to provide for George's college education and how to bridge the income gap when Colin stops work but Sarah still has more than 20 years to her own retirement. Another issue is that of protection if either of them dies.

The adviser: Debbie Sotherton, principal at Three Counties Assurance Services, Gothic House, Barker Gate, Nottingham, NG1 1JU, 0115 2330.

The advice: Colin and Sarah both have death-in-service benefit of twice pensionable salary, with more benefits if death is attributable to injury at work.

so at present there is enough life cover to ensure that the main liability, the mortgage, would be repaid.

However, over the longer term this could be affected by many factors, so I would suggest that life cover of £75,000 be taken out on Colin. This would provide additional funds to enable Sarah to continue in employment and support George until he's completed his education. I would also suggest that in Sarah's case life cover of £150,000 is sought, as Colin, George's carer, could be left in a vulnerable position in the event of her death.

As the chance of suffering a serious illness or injury is many times greater than death before retirement, I would recommend that critical illness cover, which pays out on diagnosis of a range of diseases, be incorporated within these arrangements. Scottish Provident offers cover, increasing each year in line with inflation, for £62 per month for Colin and £27 per month for Sarah.

As for saving for the future and George's education, their provision for the young boy at present is a Halifax savings account into which they put his child allowance. I'm under the impression they would like it to work harder but in order to do that I think we need a vehicle with no access before 10 years.

My recommendation is to invest the money in a maximum investment plan (MIP)—set up in joint names. Because there is an element of life cover, should the worst happen, money would still be available to George.

I would suggest using Skandia Life. It allows contributions to be varied from



Colin and Sarah Chadfield with their son George: saving child benefit in a MIP could provide £15,000

year to year without affecting the withdrawal of benefits free from personal tax 10 years after taking out the plan.

Child benefit is paid at £11.05 per week. I would suggest rounding it up to £50 per month, which would, based on a return of 10 per cent, provide a sum of £14,900 when George is 16.

Their investments comprise £12,000 on deposit, premium bonds to the value of £700 each, a Co-op Bond worth £8,000, a single company PEP with Halifax worth some £4,000 and Norwich Union shares of £3,500.

I would suggest they place a larger proportion of their money on deposit. They inform me that they need to keep £6,000 liquid for immediate access. I would suggest shopping around for the

best rates [The Independent publishes "best-buys" each week—see page 6].

As for the six-year bond, it is a joint policy, so would normally be allocated on a 50/50 basis between Colin and Sarah. The profit is only taxable if you are a higher-rate taxpayer, therefore I would suggest assigning the policy to Sarah, who is not a higher-rate taxpayer. They will need to get the Co-op to prepare a deed of assignment.

As for retirement planning, Colin is one of those rare species who will retire on maximum benefits with a final salary, index-linked pension.

However, to make his pension more tax efficient, I would suggest he takes the lump sum available at retirement and purchase a temporary

immediate annuity. This income is treated partly as return of capital, which is not taxable, so his income should be slightly better than if he took the full pension, all of which is taxable.

Sarah's situation is not so certain. If Sarah were to continue with the Fire Service, especially if she would be working full-time near her retirement age, it would be sensible to purchase added years to boost her pension.

This is not the case, so I would suggest she starts contributing into a PEP straight away, at least for the next two tax years. Unlike a pension, Sarah does not have to be earning to contribute and if she chose to semi retire before her pension kicked in, she could use the PEP to supplement her income.

UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT/THE NEILL CLERK TAKE ONE FILM-FINANCE PARTNERSHIP

The product: Take One, a film-financing partnership open to the public, sponsored by Neill Clerk Capital.

The deal: Take advantage of generous tax reliefs on risky film investments by putting in at least £10,000 before the closing date, 20 February. Money is tied up until July 2000 at the earliest.

If, and only if, all goes well, higher-rate taxpayers can hope for returns of 25 per cent a year. Plus points: Film finance can be spectacularly rewarding, with Polygram estimated to have made more than 30-times its outlay on *The Full Monty*. Risks are horrendous: turkeys such as *Resolution* or *Hudson Hawk*

have seen investors lose almost everything.

Neill Clerk has limited the downside with a combination of tax reliefs and "pre-sales". A higher-rate taxpayer who puts in £6,000 is, in effect, investing around £10,000 because of 40 per cent tax relief. Neill Clerk will only invest in a film if 60 per

cent of it is "pre-bought" (paid for in advance of production) by a TV company seeking to fill its schedules. If the film bombs, it is the Exchequer and the TV company, much more than the investor, that have lost money. To further reduce risk, "Take One" films can only be TV documentaries.

Drawbacks and risks: Not all of the investment is tax-relievable. So higher-rate taxpayers may not only make nothing, they may also lose money.

The investment is realised only by selling rights to the documentaries. Profits could exceed investment in a short time—but they might not.

If new deals for films dry up, then the money invested may have nowhere to go. It has to be spent by July 2000 or the tax reliefs may disappear.

Verdict: The best way so far to invest in film. Marks out of five: Three and a half. —Andrew Verity

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Legal & General

3/REGULAR SAVING

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 17 JANUARY 1998

Monthly discipline can yield handsome dividends



Strategies for market mayhem: South Korean employees instructed by their firm to attempt to reject negative thoughts last week. Monthly saving schemes in investment and unit trusts are another way to help smooth out peaks and troughs in the stock market

Over the longer term, investing in equities makes sense. Statistics show that in the past equity investment has usually produced better returns than other types of asset as long as you are prepared to invest for at least five years or more. But where to start? David Prosser investigates.

The trouble is, if you don't have a sizeable lump sum to invest, buying shares is difficult. Dealing charges, for example, eat into very small investments.

This is where the regular savings plans offered by most unit and investment trust companies come into their own. These are funds which offer exposure to stock markets without investors having to buy shares directly. They provide an alternative means of buying units for anyone prepared to put away a regular amount each month. Many funds allow you to invest from as little as £25 a month via a standing order or direct debit from your bank account.

These savings schemes are attractive for several reasons. "First of all," says Emma Weiss of the Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds (Autif), "a regular savings scheme makes stock market investment accessible to even the smallest investor. And investing by direct debit imposes a useful discipline on savers."

Further, nearly all the regular savings plans allow you to make the occasional lump-sum contribution to your fund when your finances permit.

Over time, small monthly investments

will add up to sizeable sums. Autif reckons £50 a month in an average UK equity income unit trust would have amassed around £4,200 over five years to last August.

Investing monthly also means that you do not have to worry about timing. Share prices rise and fall from day to day and even professional investors and fund managers frequently get their timing wrong. But regular savers avoid the worst problems of timing because their investment plans will smooth out the peaks and troughs. When the price of your unit or investment trust falls, you'll get more units or shares for your monthly payment. This can be particularly useful when, as has been happening recently in a number of Far Eastern countries, including South Korea, markets suffer from potentially prolonged financial crises.

In addition, regular savings schemes are very flexible. Most will let you change the amount you invest each month without penalty. And you can usually have any income your investments earn reinvested in the fund. If you invest with a manager that offers several unit or investment trusts, you will probably also be able to switch between funds on preferential terms.

Choosing a regular savings plan is no different to picking any other investment. First, find the fund with a savings scheme that suits you best. Work out how much you can afford to invest each month, remembering that you are likely to be tying up this money for several years or more to gain the best benefits. Then, simply fill in the application form and set up a direct debit.

Charges are important for all investors, regular savers included. Usually, a proportion of each monthly investment goes to the fund provider, which can be as much as 5 per cent with a unit trust.

Over time, investment performance is more important than charges, but avoid paying through the nose if other funds with similar performance records are cheaper. According to the Association of Investment Trust Companies (AITC), most investment trust schemes charge 1 per cent or less.

There are a few unit trust management companies that charge monthly cash fees rather than a percentage of your fund. Regular savers with Virgin's index tracking fund, for instance, pay a £2 monthly administration fee, which equates to 4 per cent of a £50 investment but just 1 per cent of a £300 monthly contribution.

You can also put up to £6,000 worth of unit and investment trusts into a personal equity plan (PEP) in the current tax year. All the income and capital growth earned in a PEP is tax free but, if you don't use up your capital gains tax allowance each year - £6,500 in 1997/98 - your will only be saving on income tax. Also, you need to check for PEP charges, as these are additional to what you pay for your regular savings scheme.

Remember though: when PEPs are replaced in 1999 by individual savings accounts (ISAs) you will only be allowed to transfer £50,000-worth of PEP investments. That is discussed on page 4.

Autif and AITC publish free fact sheets on savings schemes in unit and investment trusts. Call 0181-207 1361 and 0171-431 5222.

'The Independent' has published a free 'Guide to Making your Investments Work for You', written by Steve Lodge, personal finance editor on the 'Independent on Sunday' and sponsored by Westway Financial Services. Call 0800-137 9749, or fill in the coupon on page 6.

Bank on setting something aside

To get the most out of your money you need to decide what you are saving for. Is it an emergency pot for the proverbial rainy day, or are you saving for something specific such as a holiday? Then you should have some idea of how long to plan to save for and how much notice you are prepared to give when you want access to your money.

If you want instant access you no longer have to accept pitifully low rates of interest. The best deals tend to be on instant access postal accounts, which typically involve sending a withdrawal form to the bank or building society that send you a cheque by return of post.

But some building societies, such as Nationwide, now offer instant access postal accounts with a cashpoint card for use in emergencies. You can open this account with just £1 and interest starts at 6.7 per cent, rising to 6.85 per cent for over £10,000 and 7 per cent over £25,000.

It is also worth checking out the instant access accounts

offered by the new-style banks run by supermarkets and insurance companies. Among the best instant access accounts is Sainsbury Bank's, which pays a flat rate of 6.5 per cent on savings of £1 or more, while Scottish Widows Bank offers 6.9 per cent on balances of £500 or more.

Postal accounts requiring a notice period tend to offer better rates of interest but usually require a relatively high minimum balance. For example, Chelsea Building Society's POST-Net Option 40 postal account requires a minimum balance of £5,000 and 40 days' notice before making a withdrawal. In return you earn 7.55 per cent interest. If you are prepared to give a longer notice period, you could consider Legal & General Bank's 60-day notice postal account, which pays 7.65 per cent on £2,500.

For those prepared to save a set amount on a regular basis there is a wide range of accounts available. You usually have to save a set amount for a fixed period in return for an enhanced

rate of interest. Bradford & Bingley, for example, offers 7.15 per cent if you agree to save a fixed amount between £10 and £100 a month for three years.

If you are able to save for five years, you should open a tax-exempt special savings account (Tessa). You can save up to £9,000 - £3,000 in year one, £1,800 in years two, three and four, and £600 in year five. Tessa is tax-free providing you do not withdraw more than the net annual interest each year. This makes them the best paying accounts on offer for taxpayers.

"Tessas are due to be replaced in April 1999 by the new ISAs [individual savings accounts], so it makes sense to open one now if you can," says Darren Stevens of Chelsea Building Society. "They still make good sense because any Tessa opened prior to the introduction of ISAs can be seen through to the end of its term. Regular savers and lump sum investors should take advantage of Tessa as long as they can."

- Abigail Montrose

UNIT TRUST GROUP PERFORMANCE RANKINGS

Management Group	1yr	2yrs	3yrs	4yrs	5yrs	6yrs	7yrs	8yrs	9yrs	10yrs
JUPITER 16	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Schroder	136	120	113	107	85	75	58	68	51	31
M&G	43	56	57	50	30	28	37	39	43	33
Perpetual	60	72	55	51	22	7	7	14	6	3
Barclays Unicorn	39	38	39	40	40	44	51	47	72	69
Fidelity	72	60	50	41	10	17	28	63	22	9

Extracts from Investment Intelligence - Group Weighted Performance Tables of all unit trust management groups, cumulative to 1.1.98

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*Source: Miroslav Ltd, buying price to selling price from 1.3.91 - 28.12.97, the UK Stockmarket Fund had an average annualised growth rate of 13.13% for an investment of £100 per month.

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All references to taxation are to UK taxation and are based on the Woolwich's understanding of UK law and current Revenue practice as at 15th June 1997. Tax reliefs related to unit trusts and their value will depend on your own financial circumstances. Government allowances for the Individual Savings Account (ISA) which replaced PEPs may not be made after 30th April 1999 but that existing PEP customers will be able to switch their PEP holdings into an ISA subject to an overall valuation limit of £200,000. Woolwich plc represents only Woolwich Life, Woolwich Unit Trust Managers and Woolwich PEP Managers who are regulated by the Financial Services Authority for life assurance, pension, unit trusts and investment business. Woolwich plc is also regulated by the FSA. Registered Office of Woolwich plc (Registered in England No: 22652091), Woolwich Life Assurance Company Limited (Registered in England No: 251731), Woolwich Unit Trust Managers Limited (Registered in England No: 2564204) and Woolwich PEP Managers (Registered in England No: 251731) at Woolwich, Kent DA6 7TR.

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4/REGULAR SAVING

Prepare for new accounts

Once upon a time, tax-free investments meant PEPs and Tessas, two savings vehicles introduced by the previous Conservative administration. But from April 1999 Labour's brave new plan, the Individual Savings Account, comes into force. Simon Read guides us through its implications.

To anyone planning to make regular savings, the proposed Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs) look like offering valuable tax benefits. After they are introduced in April 1999, they will allow you to save up to £5,000 a year in a variety of different ways, including up to £1,000 in a deposit account and up to £1,000 through an insurance company policy - including old-style with-profits endowments which have a element of life cover.

The attraction of ISAs will be that all gains will be free of personal tax liabilities. As such, they will be replacing the existing personal equity plans (PEPs) and tax-exempt special savings accounts (Tessas). Indeed, cash in PEPs and Tessas must be transferred to the new account. PEP holders will have until 5 October 1999 to transfer their savings into an ISA. Those with a Tessa will have to wait until it reaches maturity before they have to transfer the proceeds.

Both PEPs and Tessas have been responsible for encouraging many people to get the regular savings habit. Some financial experts, however, claim that the new ISAs will not be such an attractive proposition. This is largely because of the planned introduction of a new lifetime limit of £50,000 on the accounts.

"The savings habit will not flourish as we enter the 1998 PEP season, unless they realise that a lifetime limit is a disincentive for people to save now," says Marc Sylvain, managing director of Fidelity Investments. "We are urging the Government to reconsider this element of the ISA package. It serves neither the investors' nor the Government's interests."

Don Clark, managing director of Wolverhampton-based IFA Torquil Clark, agrees. "I think the imposition of such an arbitrary limit will have a detrimental effect on savings," he says. "The buy it or lose it mentality which has helped make PEPs a success will disappear. I would like to see the limit abolished altogether or increased to £100,000."

This could happen. The ISA proposals are precisely that - proposals. Interested parties have until the end of January to persuade the Government to change its mind on any aspect of the ISA. This includes the proposed £50,000 life-

time limit. Don Clark, for one, thinks a rethink on this is highly possible. "I feel that the £50,000 limit is far from final at the moment," he says.

You can help change the Government's mind. If you wish to lobby for a higher limit, write to your MP or to Keith Brown at the Inland Revenue, Room 234, Southwest Wing, Bush House, London WC2B 4RD.

Until the exact details of the ISA are finally announced, it will be a little difficult to know how to prepare for the new savings accounts. Do nothing yet, suggests Andrew Barker, operations director of Skipton Financial Services, the independent financial advice arm of the Skipton Building Society. He cautions investors: "The best approach is to wait and see. ISA providers will not be able to publish details of their new accounts for a considerable time, not while the rules that will govern them can still be subject to change."

All PEP holders will get statements of their accounts in April 1999. They will then have until October to switch to a new ISA that their plan manager is likely to be offering them. To make the transfer at the time, they will simply need to return a tear-off slip. Most PEP managers have already committed themselves to making no additional charges for the transfer.

Tessa holders will have until their accounts mature before they have to transfer the cash into an ISA. Wise savers will therefore start a new Tessa between now and April 1999 to get the additional tax allowance. You are allowed to save up to £9,000 over five years in a Tessa. Anyone starting a Tessa before April 1999 will, therefore, have five years of the tax benefits. They will also be able to save up to £5,000 in an ISA for the additional tax-free gains.

"The ISA heralds some improvements over its tax-free predecessors. As well as allowing instant access to your fund, something that you cannot do with Tessas and some of the other tax-free savings schemes without losing the tax advantages, they will also widen the range of qualifying investments to National Savings and life assurance," points out Mr Barker.

"However, these improvements pale into insignificance when compared with the eventual removal of tax credits for dividends and the introduction of a lifetime savings limit of £50,000 for investors."

Despite these shortcomings, ISAs will still offer a savings haven, free from income and capital gains tax, and you might even win one of the 50 monthly prizes of £1,000 to compensate for the disadvantages.

Independent financial adviser Towry Law has produced a free consumer guide to Individual Savings Accounts which is available from Towry Law, Raylis House, Stoke Poges Lane, Slough, Berkshire SL1 3PB, or phone 0345 868244.

How to retire in greater comfort

Saving regularly as part of pension planning is one of the most sensible things any of us can do. There are many ways to do this, but as Tony Lyons warns, the earlier you start, the better.

Relying on the state for a reasonable pension is foolhardy at best. The basic state pension in the future will not go very far and probably won't keep anyone off the poverty line.

When the Government unveils its ideas about the new "stateholder pension", which will provide a second-tier pension, later this year, it may go some way to filling the gap between being poor and being comfortable in retirement.

But to ensure an adequate income after you retire, you should start saving now.

"Lots of people put off starting a pension plan because they think they have left it too late," says Tony Woods, marketing director of Virgin Direct. "But it's never too late. Obviously, the younger you start the better, but people should start as soon as they can."

If you work for an employer with a company pension scheme, then joining it will usually provide the best means of ensuring a comfortable retirement. Up to 15 per cent of your income can be saved in the scheme and you will receive relief at your top rate of tax on the money you plough in. You may find your company will contribute a reasonable amount, or even guarantee certain benefits to you at retirement, depending on length of service.

If there is no such scheme where you work, you are self-employed or you have other earnings, then you could look at personal pension plans. Don't be put off because they can be difficult to understand, have complex rules and have received bad publicity over the past few years because of had mis-selling in the 1980s.

The earlier you start, the better. To provide £1,000 a year of pension at today's prices at age 60, a 25-year-old man needs to save £35 a month in a personal pension, while a woman would have to contribute £39. For a 30-year-old, the contributions go up to £40 and £45 a month respectively. But if you do nothing about your pension until you are 50, you will have to pay in £101 or £113. Women pay more because they live longer, so they receive pensions for a longer period.

"We find that the biggest barrier to people starting a pension is that they don't believe how generous the tax breaks are," says Mr Woods. "A personal pension is the savings vehicle with the most mind-blowing tax breaks."



Step lively: The earlier you begin paying into a pension the easier it is
Photograph: Geraint Lewis

a basic-rate taxpayer £192.50 and a higher-rate person £150.

Because of the generous tax relief, the rules on contributions are strict. Only earnings up to £84,000 can be taken into account for most people, and the percentage of this that can be invested is determined by your age, as in the table.

Most pensions sold today are equity linked. This means that your savings are invested in stocks and shares. While these go up and down in value, over the long term they have outperformed all other conventional types of investment. While performance of the underlying investments is of the greatest concern, so is the charging structure imposed by the pension plan provider.

In the past, personal pension plans attracted very high charges with significant penalties if payments were charged or stopped. Nowadays, with the rise of providers who sell direct, the charges are more reasonable while the newer plans have become more flexible.

So always look for a company with low charges and

Pension contributions	
Age on 6 April	Maximum % of earnings
Under 35	17.5
36-45	20
46-50	25
51-55	30
56-60	35
61-74	40

flexible rules. Independent financial advisers can help but may charge a fee if you want to compare traditional com-

panies with the newer breed of direct providers.

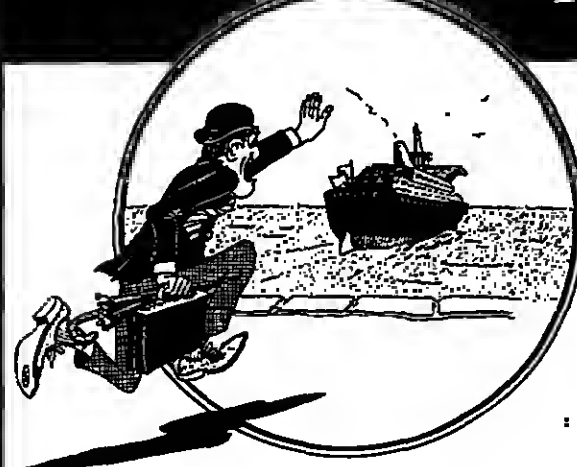
According to a number of recent surveys which looked at the projected values of various personal pension plans, companies that seem to offer the best returns include Equitable Life, Scottish Widows, Legal & General Direct, Eagle Star Direct and Virgin. The key to the ability of these companies to project higher than average returns "all boils down to our low running costs", says Nigel Webb, senior manager at Equitable Life. "If you have low expenses you can offer savers a good deal. We employ just 400 salespeople, who are paid salaries not commission, and they generate a lot of business."

Anyone taking out a pension plan has to stipulate their retirement date at the outset. The minimum age you can take the proceeds is 50. If you stop working earlier than the date you specified, you could be penalised, although many newer schemes do now allow for this.

You should, therefore, choose a variety of ways of saving. Picking a number of different plans, with different retirement dates, is one solution so long as you stay within the overall contribution limits. You can also use personal equity plans, and individual savings accounts when they become available in 15 months time, as an additional way to invest for retirement.

Whatever you do, make sure you that you regularly invest now so that you will be able to enjoy a comfortable retirement later. Most pension experts recommend that you save at least 10 per cent of your income. The older you are, or the later you start, the higher this should be.

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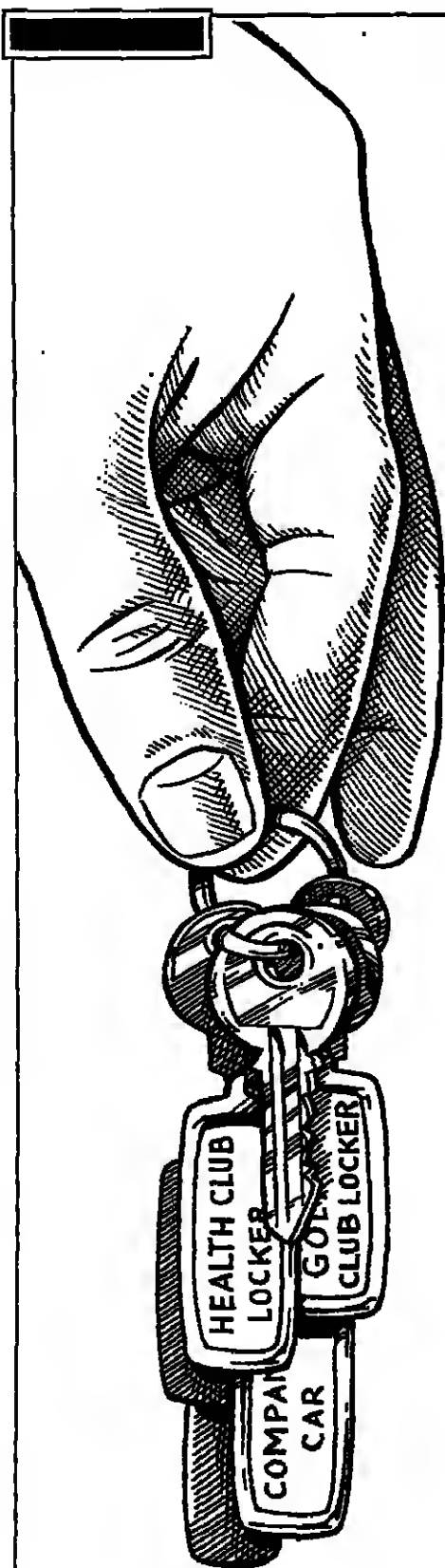
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5/PERSONAL FINANCE

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 17 JANUARY 1998
5



THE
JONATHAN DAVIS
COLUMN

The croynism at the heart of Asia's crisis

Despite the steady stream of news reports chronicling the latest events in Japan, Korea and Indonesia, I suspect few people in this country have any clear sense of exactly what is happening, beyond the feeling that crisis is probably an appropriate term for what is taking place.

My crystal ball is certainly no better than anyone else's, but what is clear is that there are two distinct sides to what is happening. One is the developing economic and financial crisis in a number of Asian countries, all of whom trade with each other and therefore are vulnerable to contagion from each other's problems.

At the root of the problem is the apparent indication that the so-called Asian miracle is running out of steam. The rapid growth of the past 20 years is slowing down, with many of the tiger economies which led the way now showing signs of losing their competitive edge. The Japanese economy has been stalled for several years now, with its Government unable to find effective measures to restimulate growth, but what is new is that the second tier of Asian countries, such as Korea and Indonesia, are also now feeling the heat, with their currencies weakening and their industries afflicted by over capacity and rapidly disappearing demand.

This in turn has been compounded by a serious banking crisis of the kind that traditionally follows periods of rapid growth, with many banks and banking institutions which lent freely in the years of fat, finding themselves over exposed. This financial crisis has exposed many of the fault lines in the way that these countries have managed their financial affairs - too much cronyism, too many complex interparty loans, a collapse in collateral values, and so on (not that this is a problem from which western banks have been immune in the past!).

After years of effective state control, the Japanese have finally allowed a leading bank and a large stockbroking firm to go bust, but there are many more financial institutions which are technically insolvent. With

no inflation to erode the value of their bad debts, it seems clear that it is going to take quite a long time for the bad debts and financial problems in many of the leading Asian countries to be worked out of the system.

The second aspect of the crisis is the reaction of the financial markets to this unfolding story of newly apparent economic problems. As always tends to happen in such circumstances, sentiment towards Asia as a focus of investment is rapidly turning sour. The wild exuberance which led many stockbroking firms to carry on peddling the merits of the Tokyo stock market when it was

ago, have also started to take fright at the way the crisis is developing, retreating to "safer" havens.

The stock market statistics tell their own story. Of the 15 largest developed country markets last year, only one went down last year - and that was Japan (which fell 21 per cent and is currently stuck in a trading range around the 14,000-15,000 level).

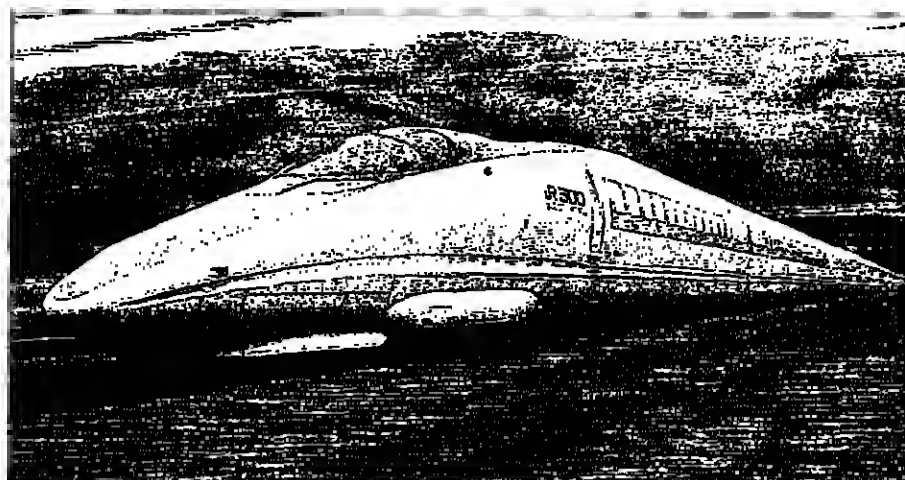
All the other 14 markets rose. Of the 11 leading stock markets in Asia, only three - China, India and Taiwan - rose in local currency terms. Most of the others were down, by anything between 20 per cent and 60 per cent over the year. Not surprisingly,

over seven years (plus 60 per cent), but down 31 per cent over both one and three years. Because of widening discounts, equivalent investment trusts have turned in an even worse performance. As these are average results, some of the individual fund outcomes are inevitably worse still - pity the poor investor who opted to buy a Thailand unit trust three years ago. It has lost nearly 80 per cent of its value over the period.

But what now? There is no question that the crisis, in both economics and sentiment, is a real one. Conventional wisdom now is: avoid the region like the plague. It is too risky. But, of course, for many Asian countries the advice is far too late. The risk has been there from the beginning in many Asian countries: it is the flip side of the above average returns which the region has generated for most of the 1990s. The case for buying individual country funds outside Europe or the United States has always seemed weak to me, given the specific risks involved in many individual emerging markets. Regional funds are not much better, in my view, unless you really think you are capable of distinguishing which region is going to do better than another.

As I said last month, however, the case for putting a modest amount of money into a diversified emerging markets investment trust at a discount of 20 per cent is another matter. Provided you are a genuinely long term investor, the value looks attractive to me. It is, after all, when things are at their gloomiest that the best bargains become available.

It will undoubtedly spill over and affect our own stock markets in due course, though how badly is impossible to say. The other lesson to remember is that just because markets keep going up, it does not mean they cannot be overvalued at the same time. Just look back to what they were saying about how attractive Japanese shares still looked in 1988/89 on a p/e ratio of 60! Even in markets, where hopes are free and plentiful, reality has a nasty habit of catching up in the end.



No longer like the bullet train: Japan's economy has been stalled for several years

absurdly overvalued in the late 1980s is being replaced by unmistakable signs of anxiety in many markets.

Typically, Hong Kong, the most volatile of all the world's leading stock markets, is taking a lead again (was it only a year ago that the market was booming?), but institutional investors in Europe and the United States, who were merrily still buying into both the Asian and emerging markets story a year

ago, have also started to take fright at the way the crisis is developing, retreating to "safer" havens.

The latest performance statistics paint a sorry picture. In the year to mid-December, for example, the average Japan-only unit trust was down by 28 per cent over one year, 39 per cent over three years and 5 per cent over seven years. The average Far East fund (excluding Japan) is still comfortably ahead

EMU threatens housing boom and bust for Britain

The UK mortgage market may need a big shake-up before Britain is ready to join EMU. Paul Slade reports.

higher the proportion of variable-rate debt, the more the country's housing market will react to interest rate changes.

Mr Meen says the cost of fixed and variable-rate loans at the moment are close enough to need only a small subsidy, and he suggests mortgage interest relief (Miras) should be given only to those with a fixed-rate loan. But some mortgage experts are sceptical. Ian Darby of independent mortgage advisers John Charcol doubts whether Miras alone would provide much of an incentive, particularly as the value of the relief is to drop to 10 per cent on 6 April this year. He says: "If you did have 2 per cent off interest rates, you could buy a five-year fix at about 6 per cent."

Simon Tyler of Chase de Vere Mortgage Management believes the real impact of Britain joining EMU for UK borrowers would be other European lenders entering our market.

He says: "Once we'd been in EMU five years, it will be a more competitive market for borrowers as well. But, right now, we've got probably the most competitive mortgage market we've ever seen in the UK."

Bringing UK interest rates into line with continental ones to qualify for European Monetary Union in 1999 could bring a return to boom-or-bust for the UK housing market, a new report warns.

Geoffrey Meen, of Oxford Economic Forecasting, an independent think-tank, says UK interest rates would have to fall by 2 per cent or 3 per cent to match those elsewhere in Europe. This could lead to renewed volatility for UK house prices, he argues.

Cancelling out the effect of a 2 per cent drop in interest rates on joining EMU would mean an extra 3p in the pound on income tax. His preferred solution is a small subsidy for those taking a fixed-rate loan, to encourage UK borrowers to act more like those on the Continent. About 80 per cent of mortgage debt in the UK is variable rate, against 50 per cent in Italy and just 5 per cent in Germany and France. The

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ROBIN AMLÖT

INTERNET
INVESTOR

After the way the stock market has been behaving recently, plenty of investors, both professional and private, may be feeling a little foolish about some of their investment decisions. However, there is one website which glories in its foolishness - The Motley Fool.

The original Motley Fool site was first established in the US in 1993, which makes it positively ancient by web standards. In an interview on the business television channel CNBC, one of the Fool's founders, Tom Gardner, commented: "It's your time horizon, really. We concern ourselves with 15 and 20-year returns. And the market has often focused just on the next 15 to 20 minutes."

The Motley Fool name comes directly from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Jacques

says in Act II, scene VII: "A fool, a fool, I see a fool in the forest, a motley fool", going on to say "I am ambitious for a motley coat" and "Motley's the only wear".

Motley was the paricoloured garment worn by Elizabethan court jesters.

The jester, as well as being a sort of medieval stand-up comedian and clown rolled into one, was also the only chap who could get away with telling home truths to the monarch without having his head removed from his shoulders.

The Motley Fool's stated aims are to educate, amuse, and enrich the individual investor. "to prove to you that the best person to manage your money is YOU on the grounds that no one will have your financial well-being as close to their heart as you do yourself".

The site looks to demonstrate that the key to investment success is doing one's homework and that such "homework" can be fun.

The website is dedicated to creating wealth by investing in shares and only shares: not options, not futures, not commodities. The Fool is not even particularly fond of unit trusts and other mutual funds, given the costs of poorly performing fund managers.

Unusually, the Motley Fool is "foolish enough" to put its money where its mouth is. In addition to all the information and instruction the site carries, it also runs three real-money model portfolios: the Fool Portfolio; the Boring Portfolio; and the Drip Portfolio.

These demonstrate methods of portfolio management and are the closest the site actually

comes to giving stock "tips". However, to ensure that it is not laid open to charges of price manipulation, any changes to the portfolios are announced in advance of trade.

On the web, the Motley Fool is targeted at a US audience. However, it also offers a service designed for UK investors. Fool UK is part of the services offered by AOL UK.

It does not tout specific investment products. The website makes its money from carrying advertising, usage charges paid by AOL, and selling books and a variety of other products in the Foolshop online.

Fool UK includes share prices, a guide to "Beat the Footsie", what it claims is an idiot-proof 10-step guide to investing in the UK market and daily market news.

In addition to this site content, Fool UK offers message boards where AOL members can share their own investment ideas.

If you already have web access you can see the US Motley Fool site but you will not be able to view Fool UK unless you are a member of AOL.

AOL, which used to call itself America Online but now prefers the acronym, claims to be the largest internet service provider in the world, with 10 million members, including more than 250,000 in the UK. If you are not an AOL member, you can download AOL software and take out trial membership from the AOL website.

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6/PERSONAL FINANCE

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BRIAN TORA



A little panic would not hurt

It is becoming rather difficult to ignore the Far East. The roller-coaster ride in Hong Kong and other markets may seem of little consequence in the Square Mile, but we may yet find the Asian contagion is not confined to the Pacific Rim.

The UK investment community has had a long-standing love affair with the Far East and the arguments have been all too familiar: large populations with aspirations and a strong work ethic; high savings ratios; commercial flare. The trouble is that even though all these factors are present they no longer work.

So where did it all go wrong? Dr Mahathir Mohammed, Malaysia's Prime Minister, recently extolled the virtues of his country. He likened the strong growth achieved to a river in flood. The rocks beneath the surface were concealed by the floodwater. In this case the rocks appear to have been profligate lending, skill shortages and poor management. The speed at which Far East growth hit the buffers was quite alarming. And yet, this time last year, no one was expecting it.

Worries over the likely knock-on effects have been enough to generate a little introspection in the US market. Prices there have retrenched by some 10 per cent, but there is still little sign of panic in Wall Street. Indeed, the reaction in North America and Europe seems more like indifference. But does the end of a period of high growth really matter? Much depends upon what happens next. That world

growth will be affected is undoubted. There is now much less money around the Pacific Rim and demand for manufactured goods must decline. Many countries must be hoping that they can export their way out of trouble. Indeed, given the devaluations, we can expect cheap Asian goods on offer here before long. That does not augur well for some industries, both in Europe and America.

Interestingly, it is the pace of growth in South-east Asia that helped create the problem. In some areas, skill shortages drove up wages and reduced competitiveness.

One of the aspects of these recent developments has been to highlight the over-capacity in many areas of manufacturing production. Improved techniques, better inventory management and the continuing forward march of information technology have brought great changes. Still, if you can't afford to spend the money, the choice is between stockpiling goods and closing whole production lines down. The latter seems inevitable. The worry must be that social unrest could follow.

The message so far for the developed world has been, don't panic but a little bit of panic may now be appropriate. And we all need to keep our fingers crossed that things on the other side of the world do not get too much worse before they get better.

Brian Tora is chairman of the investment strategy committee at Greig Middleton, stock-brokers.

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Clydesdale Bank	0800 240024	9.5% to 11.5%	10p	£100
Royal Bank of Scotland	0800 121121	10.7% to 12.7%	10p	£100
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INSTANT ACCESS POSTAL ACCOUNTS					
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NOTICE ACCOUNTS & BONDS					
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Wesleyan	0500 222200	Instant Transfer	Instant (R)	5.00%	7.25%
Investment Bank (UK)	0171 253 1650	Basic Plan	1 Year	5.00%	7.50%
CHEQUE ACCOUNTS					
Investment Bank (UK)	0171 253 1650	HCA 5000	Instant	6.50%	Monthly
Cheltenham BS	0800 425425	Classic Postal	Instant	5.00%	7.50%
FIXED RATE BONDS					
Wesleyan	0500 222200	Fixed Rate Bond	1 Year	5.00%	7.50%
Cheltenham BS	0500 425425	Fixed Rate Bond	1 Year	5.00%	7.50%
FIRST TESSAS					
Wesleyan	0500 222200	Fixed Rate Bond	1 Year	5.00%	7.50%
Cheltenham BS	0500 425425	Fixed Rate Bond	1 Year	5.00%	7.50%
FOLLOW-ON TESSAS					
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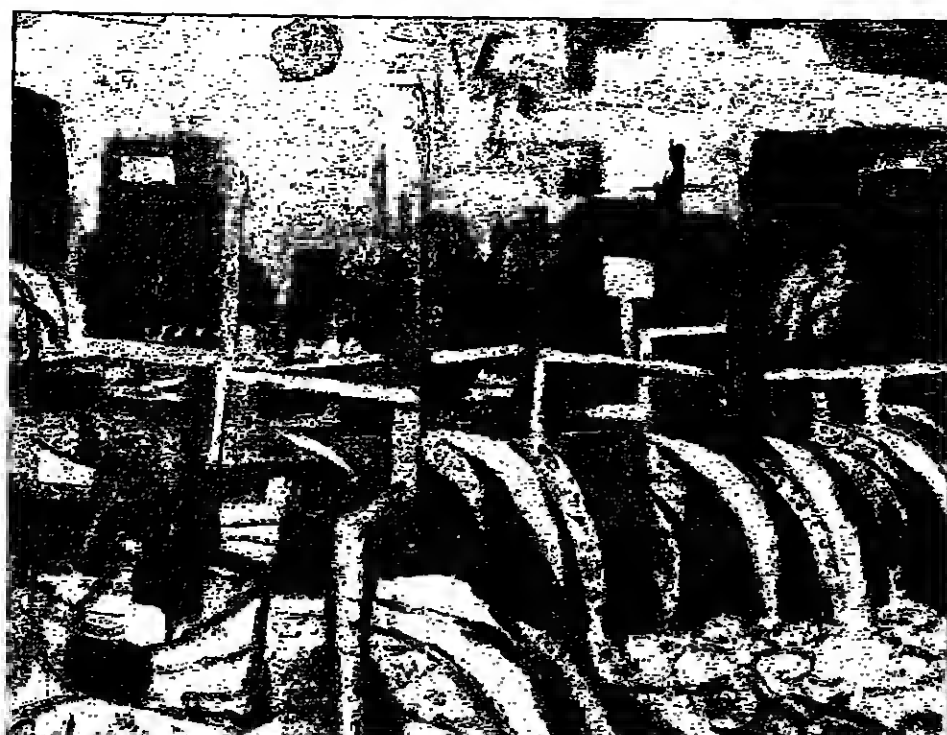
7/PERSONAL FINANCE

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 17 JANUARY 1998

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A new dawn for Modern Brit Art?

Private buyers are piling into the Modern British paintings market, which, in November sales, showed signs of blowing its top. John Windsor examines whether a peak has been reached.



London calling: 'The Weir' by Julian Trevelyan fetched £7,130 in November

Some auctioneers are trumpeting a top-down revival of the market, which crashed spectacularly in 1991-92, leaving some speculators with paintings worth a third of what they had paid and Cork Street festooned with To Let signs.

The first auction since November's headline prices is at Phillips on Tuesday (11am) with estimates mostly under £1,000. Its target audience - new buyers with modest means - may well be confused: gong-banging for new Lowry and Spencer price records has become an annual event since the crash, while the market as a whole has been hauling itself up by its bootstraps. The leading dealer Leslie Waddington warns: "It's a gradual recovery, not complete - not a bad market, but not yet a strong one."

There is not much action in the £100,000-£200,000 range but the market under £20,000 is worth a look.

First point to note is that with dealers still strapped for cash and being outbid by private buyers (Sotheby's estimates 85 per cent of its buyers are private and Christie's estimates 70 per cent, a reverse of the pre-crash situation), market-making in specific names by dealers is only just beginning again. Susannah Pollen of Sotheby's reports that, whereas previously she could predict which lots would be carried off by which dealers, nowadays the bids are a product of "a hundred different whims" of private buyers. This makes it difficult for investors to spot price trends to follow.

These days, whenever a dealer is seen buying up a name, the private buyer com-

petition tends to pile in. For example, London dealer David Messum recently began bidding for the idiosyncratic figurative paintings of Julian Trevelyan RA (1910-1988), who exhibited at the first International Surrealist exhibition in London in 1936, was associated with the London Group, and whose work will have a touring retrospective curated by Nicholas Usherwood, beginning in October at the RCA, where Trevelyan taught Hockney print making.

Messum paid only £2,530 for Trevelyan's *Crean Spring* landscape, estimated £2,500-£3,500 at Christie's South Kensington in September. But two months later, private bidders at Christie's King Street saleroom forced him up to £7,130 for Trevelyan's *The Weir*, which carried the same estimate.

Pre-recession, the dealers were the market-makers. They lent stability, knowing that they had to supply clients at reasonable prices while earning a margin for themselves. These days, outbid and empty-handed, they smart under the auctioneer's hollow, "thank you for your support" on their way out.

The consolation is that the new private buyers are, for the most part, not speculators likely to bust the market by dumping at the first tremors of a wobble in prices. Their taste is towards adventurous figuratives rather than the Impressionist style.

One dealer whose buying is worth watching is Spink-Leger, a marriage of two galleries injected with new money

last September by its owners, Christie's. They have been bidding aggressively for British watercolours and Modern Brits and will be holding a selling exhibition of 20th century British artists in April.

Among them will be Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, killed in the first World War. Ten of his pencil and pen-and-ink drawings of animals, birds and people are in Phillips' sale next week, estimated at under £1,000. Spink-Leger will also be showing Sickert, William and Ben Nicholson, Innes, Yeats, Burra, Pasmore, Spencer, Spear, Tunnard and Vaughan.

If you think it demeaning to follow dealers, swot up on your art history and go for lesser-known members of the Mod Brit "schools" - Newlyn, Slade, Camden Town, Euston Road, Bloomsbury, St Ives, Neo-Romantic and London.

Underpriced but talented names can rise suddenly as bidders collectively realise that their low prices are unsustainable. The colourful, semi-abstract stills of Mary Fedden (born 1915) fell at auction by 50-60 per cent from their peak of 1988-90. They could be had for £2,000-£4,000 until last October.

Now they fetch £3,000-£8,500 and are still rising. Similar recognition may be descending upon another RA, Frederick Gore (b 1913), whose work is rare at auction. Somebody got a bargain when they bought his *Spring Landscape*, *Clement's Reach*, *Moorham*, full of vibrant blue and pink furrows, for £2,990 in Christie's November sale.

The ever-popular but much-derided

sunlit nudes of Ken Russell RA, which have reached Fedden's prices and are firming up still further, sell best if they are recent. People seem to want to know what the indefatigable 65-year old is getting up to. Keith Vaughan's prices are firming up, too, but the buying power for his is homosexual.

Do your own research on price trends - individual auction results can be misleading. For example, three blocky paintings by William Scott RA (1913-1989), who has benefited from a critical re-assessment, failed to sell in Sotheby's November sale. The art trade press reported that the market for him seemed to be running out of steam. In fact, the best Scotts are fetching around £40,000, double 1989 values. Sotheby's estimates of up to £60,000-£80,000 were over-egged.

If you are after a managed investment in Mod Brits, find a reliable dealer in charge of selling a deceased artist's estate, whose income depends upon maximising prices. David Messum is selling the Impressionistic, Braque-like landscapes and still lifes of the Suffolk artist Peggy Somerville (1918-1975) at judicious intervals. Her work is catalogued in a book, *Peggy Somerville: An English Impressionist*, by Stephen Reiss, £25, published by the Antique Collectors' Club. Prices: from £500 for drawings and pastels, oils around £2,500.

Phillips (0171-629 6602); David Messum (0171-437 5545)

UNDERSTANDING THE STOCK MARKET

Why it's worth becoming familiar with Footsie

"The top 100 shares quoted on the London stock market, whose changes in price are measured constantly to see how the market generally is moving," is the neat way that Gill Nott, the chief executive of ProShare, describes the Financial Times/Stock Exchange 100 index. The FTSE 100 is mentioned in most news bulletins and its progress is always featured whenever there is a crisis on one of the world's stock exchanges.

Affectionately known as the Footsie, it may be viewed as one of the market's barometers. It can be used as a yardstick against which to measure the performance of individual shares or a portfolio. It was launched on 3 January 1984 with a base of 1,000. When it broke through the 5,000 level on 6 August 1997, it meant the shares it represents had risen by a multiple of five in 13 years and 215 days.

One of the main reasons for the birth of the Footsie was Chicago's then newly established Traded Options and Financial Futures market. So that London could match the services provided in Chicago, the City wanted a constantly up-dated index so that products could be developed to allow investors to hedge, or take a view on future market trends, with a single transaction.

Before the introduction of the Footsie there were only two stock market indices. The FT Ordinary Share Index, established in 1935, only comprises 30 constituents and was considered unrepresentative of the market generally. Also, it is an unweighted geometric index which, while curbing the effect of dramatic price movements, has a bias to downward turns over time. Furthermore it was only calculated each hour.

A completely fresh start was called for. An index with 100 constituents was chosen be-

cause more than this number would not have resulted in speedy calculations, while less would not be an accurate way of measuring the market's performance. The companies are selected by their market capitalisation, which is simply the total number of shares they have issued multiplied by their price in the market. The Footsie is therefore an index of Britain's 100 largest companies.

Those selected account for just over 70 per cent of the total market value of UK shares. However, for various reasons, some companies are excluded. This may be because the company is considered to be resident overseas for tax purposes, or it is a subsidiary of a company already in the index or because it has a large, static shareholding.

Technically, the Footsie is a weighted arithmetic index, which means that a change in price is weighted by the issued share capital of the company. Consequently, a 10 per cent movement in the shares of the smallest company in the index has less "weight" than a 10 per cent movement in the price of shares of the company which has the largest market capitalisation.

Naturally, values of companies are changing constantly. Nevertheless, alterations to the constituent list of members of the Footsie are kept to a minimum. Normally a company will only be removed if it has fallen below 110 in its market value ranking. None the less, by the time the index celebrated its 10th birthday, 42 companies had been removed from the original list. Of these, 23 had failed to keep pace with the market and shrank in comparison with their peers; 17 were taken over or merged, while Ferranti and British & Commonwealth had failed.

The first change took place on 19 January 1984 when J

Rothschild replaced Eagle Star. Usually changes are made each quarter following the meaning of the FTSE Actuaries UK Indices Committee.

On 10 December this year, the Committee approved the inclusion of Mercury Asset Management (MAM), British Energy and Amvescap. RMC Group, Blue Circle Industries and TI Group were excluded. The changes became effective on 22 December.

However, on 23 December Merrill Lynch's bid for MAM became unconditional. As a result, the Committee's rules concerning takeovers came into play and Blue Circle, excluded just 24-hours previously, was reinstated.

The same rules were used

When the FTSE 100 passed 5,000 last August it meant shares had risen five-fold in 13 years

on 16 December following the merger of Guinness and Grand Metropolitan to create Diageo. On that occasion, Nycomed Amersham was admitted to the index. To ensure that natural occurrences, such as mergers and takeovers, are dealt with efficiently, the Committee has a reserve list of companies on which they may draw.

Responsibility for the design, management and calculation of London's stock market indices rests with the FTSE UK Indices Committee, an autonomous body sponsored jointly by the London Stock Exchange, the Financial Times and the Institute of Actuaries.

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1997	£27,078	£13,764	£4,547

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One day, though, they'll have to deliver. And that's when the US car makers, still the world's biggest, will show their true colours.

More metal for your money

Welcome to the January used-car sales.
Superminis: If any type of car is going to defy the seasonal downturn, it will be the smaller hatchback which is perennially in demand. Everyone wants an

Off-landers: In theory 4x4 vehicles should be by far the strongest sector at this time of the year. Snow, ice and torrential rain are ideal conditions to show off. That was a few years ago, when they were fashionable. Sluggish performance, poor mpg and top-heavy handling has put them out of fashion. The only reason to buy a 4 x 4 is for work. Try a handy-sized 1992 Daihatsu Fournak, or, if you

bersome, but brilliant value at less than £5,000. **People carriers:** The Space was the first and arguably best of the breed, in 1984. An early one would still cost £3,000; £5,000 plus a 1988 model within reach. Trouble is, they're not always in perfect nick. Toyota took the van-with-windows concept and applied it to its reliable and capacious eight-seat Space Cruiser; £5,000 buys a well-cared-for '90 model. **Executive cars:** Any time of the year is a bad time for big cars. Middle-management drivers traditionally opt for Ford Granadas and Vauxhall Carltons, but there is a classier alternative. The Saab 9000 has all the luxury trimmings. The absence of a BMW or Mercedes badge makes all the difference: high-mileage examples can be bought at giveaway prices right now: 1992 2.0 CD saloon models with automatic transmission, air conditioning and an unfeasibly big boot, cost an easy £5,000. **Luxury cars:** These depreciate heavily, even with a BMW badge on the bonnet. While 3 and 5 series seem to defy gravity, £50,000 spanking new 7 series tumble to used-car reality at an alarming rate. Of course, anything could potentially

So when you go shopping this January, bear in mind that dealers are eager to do deals during their bleakest months. Also, any private advertiser is going to be pretty desperate to sell. Get a price guide such as *Parker's* from the newsagent and haggle around the trade (not retail) valuation.

It's not a lumberjack, but you won't care

You've probably read about the Land Rover Freelander—seen the ads, had the mailshots. It's the highest pro-

True, the Forester goes squiddy in a bend long before the hot Impreza, as you might expect, but then it's also able to tackle fields and farmtracks, provided they're not too bumpy. A Freelander can



SUBARU FORESTER
Specifications
 Price: £16,400. Engine: 1,994cc, four cylinders in horizontally opposed pairs, 16 valves, 122bhp at 5,600 rpm. Five-speed gearbox, four-wheel drive. Top speed 111 mph, 0-60 in 10.3 sec, 36.31 mpg.

Rivals
Honda CRV LS: £17,020. Noisy, otherwise average in every way. Options include a portable shower.
Land Rover Freelander Station Wagon: £17,995. Expensive next to Forester, but chunkier looks, better off-road ability, competitive on-road prowess.
Toyota RAV4 GX 5-door: £17,463. Not particularly tough, but light weight gives lively if buzzy performance. Looks cute, feels cheaply made.

The Forester brings together the best aspects of an estate car and a 4x4. It's cheap, too, relatively speaking. It's no beauty—it looks a bit dated and square-cut, in fact—but neither is it kitsch. If they thought about it, a lot of people

.....
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MY WORST CAR – RUSSELL GRANT'S MG 1300

When it conked out one day on the Hammersmith flyover, that was the final straw. I had to get out and push. I made it off the flyover, stopped outside a pub and I went in for a couple of stiff brandies. I never drove the MG again; I phoned my local garage and said, "get rid of it".



Venus' appearances can be deceptive

I remember buying one of the first Austin Maestros, the talking ones, which had a female voice to give you various stern warnings. I found that it was badly aspected. Its relationship to Uranus wasn't very good, and that is the planet that relates to electricies. The garage could not find any problems when I asked them to check it out, bill the

On one occasion I really should have paid closer attention to my own predictions. While reversing my VW Golf on a building site I ran over some planks, which gave way. I ended up at a 90-degree angle, looking at the sky from the bottom of a sewerage ditch.

A friend said: "Read your column in the *TV Times*." Un-

Russell Grant is presenting 'House Busters' from 19 January at 8.30pm on Channel 5. He was talking to James Rimmer

صلى الله عليه وسلم

11/PROPERTY

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 17 JANUARY 1998

AT HOME

For an utterly wicker experience ...

Until recently, willow baskets were as fashionable as lace-up shoes and bikes with mudguards. Now, as Rosalind Russell writes, you cannot open a glossy home magazine without seeing them and other willow containers squatting in kitchen units, in place of drawers, or lined up along shelves tagged with luggage labels listing the contents.

Stylists, who obviously do not have bulging cupboards and crammed drawers in their own homes, declare wicker is the way forward for storage. Bad luck for those who hoard bundles of three-year-old gas bills, but it is good news for a select bunch who may have felt left out on a limb in the scramble for high-tech living.

One of those stripping the willow is Susie Thomson, a basket weaver who admits the craft's image has been "desperate" ... until now.

"It has been very hard to get away from

the occupational therapy image," admits Ms Thomson, a recently elected Yeoman member of the Worshipful Company of Basket Makers. "Remember all those wooden trays everybody used to make?"

Ms Thomson, who grows and harvests six varieties of willow on a south London allotment, makes baskets destined for more up-market homes. She has had commissions from Egg, a Knightsbridge shop selling expensive clothes and home accessories, and from Marston and Langinger, which makes conservatories and furnishings for them.

A Susie Thomson shopping basket in the "strawberry" design, indented to follow the curves of your body while being carried, is likely to cost you £75.

"People don't expect to find a basket maker in Battersea," she acknowledges. The weaving is done in a workshop at the foot of her garden - unheated as the willow cannot be allowed to dry out. Harvesting the willow from the tennis court-sized allotment in Norbury must be done in winter when the sap is low, and the willow used within six weeks. Commercial willow strippers use machines, but

Ms Thomson does hers by hand. A wet spring such as last one encourages the willow to grow and her new crop was 8ft high when it was coppiced. When her own allotment does not yield enough willow, it can be bought in from growers in Somerset and Belgium.

A basket can take a day to weave, depending on the complexity. A pedlar basket - big enough to be regarded as a piece of furniture - can be used to store bed linen, towels or blankets and costs £180.

A traditional bride's basket, costing £90, takes around nine hours and makes an unusual wedding present. The design was inspired by a Bavarian tradition of giving a bride woven baskets to carry her dowry from her father's house to her new husband's house. "There would have been different kinds, from a white willow basket for clean laundry to others used for fruit and vegetables and they would have been carried in a procession, the number showing the status of the family," Ms Thomson says.

"Most people have a good understanding of other crafts like pottery but think of basket weavers as trolls sitting in

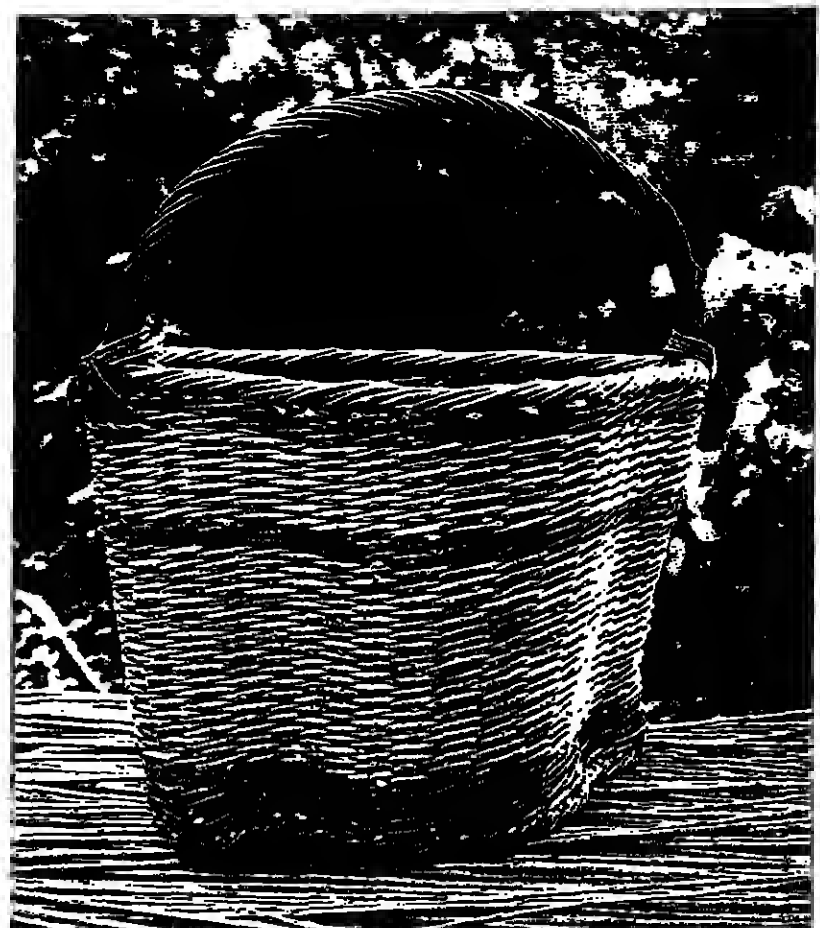
a cave, weaving away. I am quite passionate about putting style into it."

Commissions can take up to 16 weeks. Ms Thomson will be exhibiting at the Country Living Fair in London from 25 to 29 March.

There are, of course, also mass market baskets, which can be found quite easily.

Next Interiors offers a wicker storage box with side handle and hinged lid (62cm long, 38cm wide, 38cm deep) at £59.99, and a set of three shallow storage trays at £19.99. Lakeland sells willow shelf baskets, suitable for kitchen or bathroom storage, at £12.95 for two, and a willow basket trio - three sturdy baskets with wooden handles - for £16.95. The Pier's Milano sideboard houses three large wicker baskets instead of cupboards or drawers and costs £149. And Debenhams sells a square wicker chest, suitable for blankets, at £50 and bakers' baskets with handles on the sides from £10.

Susie Thomson 0171 223 4806; Next Interiors 0116 284 9424; Lakeland 015394 88100; The Pier 0171 637 7001; Debenhams enquiries 0171 408 4444.



Grown in the city: One of Susie Thomson's creations

When hunting a house, recruit a special agent

There are many ways of finding a property. One is to register with every estate agent in the area you want to live in - and risk receiving piles of dross in the mail. Another way is to define the kind of home you need and find the agent best suited to deliver it. Gnetta Vedrick examines several potential house-hunting scenarios to discover who are the movers and shakers in that field.

Years ago a house-hunting mission led me to Hamptons' Dulwich branch in London. A helpful agent took my requirements: three bedrooms, garden and as near to the village as possible.

Then it came to the crunch question. How much would I like to spend? I muttered feebly, quickly adding £10,000 I could not afford, and it became clear that Hamptons and I were incompatible. Had I said pence rather than pounds? Feeling like someone looking for lard in Harrods, I shuffled off to a, shall we say, less sought-after area where agents did not pale at my pearly price range and have lived here ever since.

There is clearly an art to choosing the right agent. It is pointless registering with Savills, the serious end of the market, if you are after a bargain repossession.

Mary-Anne Crafter describes her company, Hamptons, as "middle to upper market". Currently on the hooks is a £5m home in Mill Hill, north London. It also has "good quality period cottages" for £150,000. Hamptons has no minimum price but would it market a cheap and nasty home? "If we believed we could do it justice," Ms Crafter says. Weary home-hunters, on any budget,



Meropie Nelson: "Our clients are not interested in exteriors" Photograph: Rui Xavier

could do worse than access a central database which holds thousands of property details. Director Hilary Wade says Winkworth is London's largest agent: "We have offices from Suretham to Knightsbridge and can send a tailor-made list matching your financial specification and location."

Price range is not everything. Strutt & Parker, Knight Frank, and Aylesford may dominate established, wealthy areas such as Chelsea and Belgravia in London. But the uber-chic are turning elsewhere in pursuit of "space" in the emerging residential areas on the City's edges.

Manhattan Lofts is a prime mover in the push to change industrial space into home.

Pioneers of the now-deeply trendy Clerkenwell, over half of its apartments in N1's The Factory (a reference to Mr Warhol) have sold and many to "bankers and lawyers".

Surely Andy didn't approve of day jobs? Joe Wharf, a canal-side development is being marketed by Pilcher Hershman and its site, "Gateway to Europe" - King's Cross to you and I - is ripe for development as aspirational properties replace the area's more notorious industry.

A friend viewed a canal-side apartment but found "it smelled like the Ganges and that was in December". Development is not the only thing which should be ripe by next summer.

Shell-seekers can choose from an abundance of agents jostling for position in their quest to sell the next important space. A company's name often divulges its market which is why you will not find terrace houses on offer at Clerkenwell's Urban Spaces.

"We don't have washing lines full of details," says Meropie Nelson, negotiator. "Our market is non-traditional so we're re-defining how we sell. Our clients want to know about light and square footage, they're not interested in exteriors and often don't mind where they live as long as the space is right."

Urban Spaces' windows have concepts rather than property details. Space is de-

fined as "living, work, raw or shell" for the benefit of creative clients, designers and photographers, who want large living and working areas which they can style themselves. Lettings form a considerable slice of its market and because spaces can be idiosyncratic Meropie looks for clients "who appreciate designer German door-knobs".

Who will find that cosy retirement bungalow by the sea when you can no longer manage the urban loft's stairs? Fort Knox of Frinton, which could be named after its clients' love of security, operates through word of mouth rather than advertising. "In Frinton, if they know you they'll come to

you," says Shauna Heal, a negotiator. Other local agents rely on recommendation. "Elderly people don't like things like Internet, they haven't even got computers," says Gordon Suckling, whose company has been selling retirement homes for more than 25 years. Seventy per cent of his clients are elderly and are looking for large bungalows.

Why Frinton? "They've been coming here on holiday all their lives," Mr Suckling says. "It's their ambition to retire here for peace and quiet. People don't want to be pestered and you can't even buy an ice cream on the beach - it's virtually an island." He becomes guarded as he remembers a previous scandal to hit town: "That hoo-ha about [the council] banning the fish and chip shop, some newspaper chap had a hee in his bonnet about Frinton."

Renee Everett first used Gordon Suckling's services 28 years ago and has bought and sold through his company ever since. She has travelled but prefers Frinton. "It's my favourite place. When I'm away I can't get back fast enough."

When her husband became seriously ill they decided to sell their large house and buy a flat there. "Gordon did everything he could to make life easier for us," she says. Mrs Everett, whose husband later died feels settled in her flat and relieved to live in a community where the local agent plays a strong part. Frinton may move at a slower pace but what it lacks in technological advancement it makes up for with personal service.

Hamptons: 0171 8348822; Savills: 0171 7300822; Winkworth: 0171 7371117; Strutt & Parker: 0171 629 7282; Knight Frank: 0171 629 8171; Aylesford: 0171 351 2383; Manhattan Lofts: 0171 631 1888; Pilcher Hershman: 0171 486 5256; Urban Spaces: 0171 251 4000; Fort Knox: 01255 674099; Gordon Suckling: 01255 851185.

THREE TO VIEW WITH FAMOUS NEIGHBOURS

Number 23 St James's Gardens, in Holland Park, London W11, left, is an impressive Victorian house with impressive, but younger, neighbours who include Elton John, Jeremy Paxman, Richard Branson and Peter Hobday. The four-storey, three-bedroom house has a double reception room with 11ft ceiling height and two marble fireplaces. The lower ground floor dining room has double doors leading to an illuminated terrace and private garden designed by Penelope Hobhouse, of *Gardener* magazine. It is for sale through John Wilcox & Co for £1.45m (0171 602 2352).

Manton Weir Stables in Manton, Wiltshire, above right, is just down the road from the well known flat trainer Peter Chapple-Hyam, who runs a string of famous race horses, including many owned by Robert Sangster. Manton

Weir Stables was converted into a four-bedroom house seven years ago. The exposed timbers and beams were retained, but there is now a dining hall, sitting room, study and two bathrooms. Agents Egerton is asking for around £300,000 (0171 493 0676).

Vera Low's Cottage, right, is a 17th century thatched cottage with views across part of the Althorp Estate in Northamptonshire, ancestral home of Charles Althorp and the resting place of Diana, Princess of Wales. The restored five-bedroom house, on the edge of Upper Harlestone has an 18ft kitchen with Aga, drawing room with inglenook fireplace, a large study and double garage. It is named after a former occupant whose husband was a gardener in the Althorp estate. Agents Bidwells is asking £290,000 (0116 44 015054).

